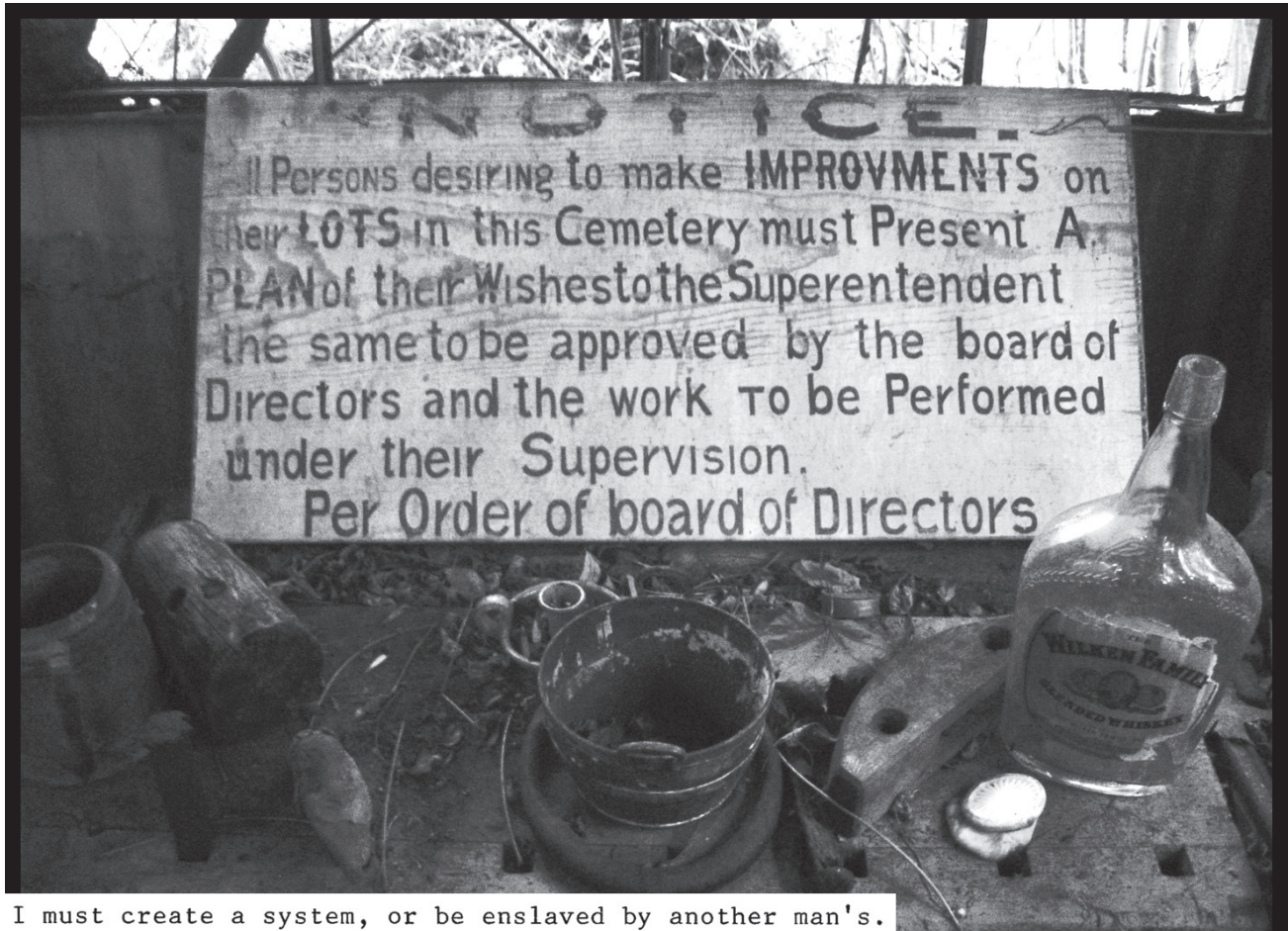


The Cenacle

It was then that a more full circle formed around the clearing, each man & the few boys like me took the hands of both on his side, clasped tightly, & falling back, like ocean waves, & within it something more, I closed my eyes, tried to listen my way to it, could not, opened my eyes again, & saw marvels indeed. Among us, & a low humm, I don't know from who first, began to emerge, barely more than colored breathing at first, then deeper & greater, & rising back in the trees around the clearing, were these Creatures, & they too were humming. I saw a White Bunny, brown & black & spotted bears, several dingoes, all close to us, & sharing this humming as though we all belong to it somehow. a purple furred dancing thing, even blue-eyed kitties, among countless others, they were





I must create a system, or be enslaved by another man's.

--William Blake, "Jerusalem."

December 24, 2015
12:50 p.m.
Short St. Donut shop
my table
Milkrose, MA.

-I've been considering this opening piece for a while now. While I was gathering contents from the contributors to this issue, happily sorting through their poems & prose. Figuring out what would fit best this issue.

Thinking about it as I get my own pieces together. A lot of writing, a lot of typing, a fair amount of editing. The fourth "Baps End Book" whose contents I was unsure of, for a long time, finally deciding to end it with the Season of Lights, nicely fitting for a December Cenance.

Labyrinthine, which I wrote to the conclusion of Part Ten. It's a book I've been writing as a whole since mid-2006, & Part Ten itself since 2014. Finished it in an all-night flurry last week.

-23-

During my annual writing trip down to Central Connecticut. Much of my writing in this issue is from those four days down there.

All of Notes from New England is, chronicling a long long day in my old college town. Took awhile to shape a lot of writing & pictures into a reasonably coherent narrative.

Two of the last three Many Musics were written on the Peter Pan bus back to Boston. The last one just finished here, bout a half hour ago. Made it here despite an achy back. Worked the achy back into the last poem.

The only idea I had for this piece was: it's snowless in Boston in December this year. A green Christmas, for those who care for that holiday. But no further ideas except...

Something about how to write, how to make Art in ~~general~~ general, not technically how to do it, or what to make Art about, but how to do it, how to distinguish a thing as your Art, making for this fact.

-24-

Think of Art as something like your blood or breath kept on the page, or canvas, or film, or clay. Think of Art as a moment in your life when you declared, "I matter. This expression matters. This moment in time matters. Whether it's about me directly, serious or silly, it matters."

Art does more than matters. It presses the life around it to matter more too.

Thinking, seeking to know, to understand, to feel deeper, to find kinder, these things matter.

Life everywhere, no, creation everywhere, matters, however mundane, petty, stupid. And the more they matter, the more the ~~more~~ mundane, petty, & stupid is liable to change. Life's funny that way.

Don't worry if others stare at you when you read your piece, show your picture. Does it breathe of your breath, bleed of your blood, is it funny or tragic in your heart? Did you spend yourself well in the creation?

These are the questions on my mind as I go about getting The Conicle

-25-

created. They give how I choose pieces, how I edit them, how I write my own. Blood, breath, music, & laughter.

The process is magical & delightful & a lot of fucking good work. It wears me down like some kind of marathon. its trophy is, the finished issue, made as good as it is because of my beloved (Kiss) & the many wonderful contributors to each number. It aspires to be perfect the way green things are perfect, moments of clear empathy are perfect, breaking of many together is perfect.

That all said, & plenty enough preached for now, & whether there's snow outside your window or not, here's best wishes to all during this Season of Lights. Blood, breath, music, laughter, pathos, & all.

[There'll be snow again
in Boston soon.
There always is. ☺]

 12/24/2015

The Cenacle

Number 95 | December 2015

Edited by Raymond Souland Jr. 

Assistant Editor: Kassandra Souland

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SCRIPTOR PRESS



NEW ENGLAND
2015

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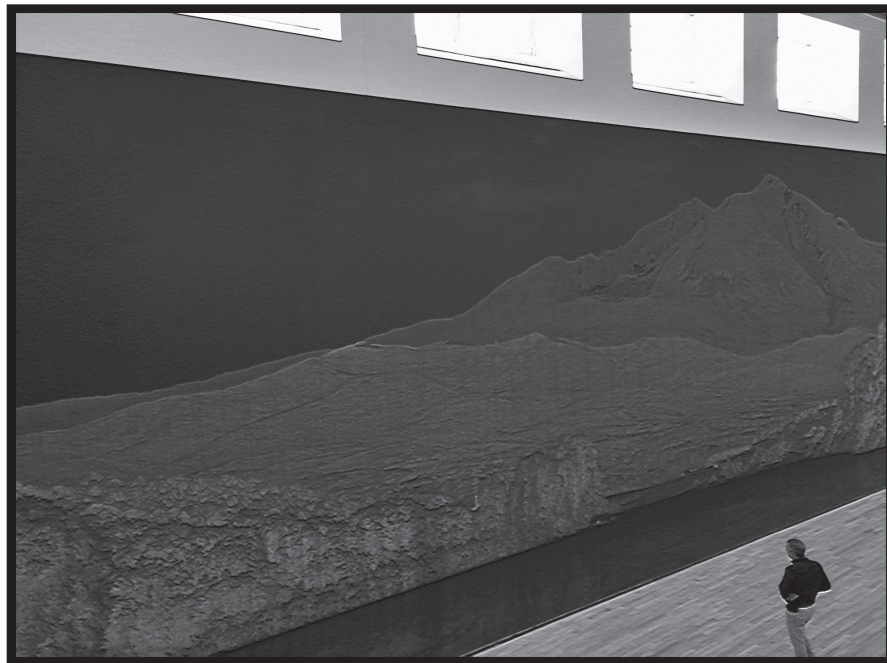
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Thank you to New Britain, Connecticut for hosting me & allowing me to wander amongst your streets, places, & specters. Much of this issue was inspired by my days travelling around you . . .



Feedback on Cenacle 94 | October 2015

From Joe Coleman:

Reading “Fahrenheit, Electricity, and a Flexible Flyer” by Tom Sheehan, I travel on crafted prose and find myself immersed in memories carefully sketched amidst glimpses of a Saugus, Massachusetts history in which Tom discovers his distinctive place.

Tom Sheehan offers guided armchair tours . . . Join him on his sled. Climb into a Taylor Cub . . . Take a seat and reminisce beside a masterful, unselfconscious writer. His short story is a magic carpet. This flexible flyer bends Time itself. And everything temporal seems to dilate. And this one night becomes part of all that was, is, and shall be.

Conjuring up the mythic Theda Burton, Tom simultaneously summons other ghosts, plus sights and sounds of many pasts. I see them, I hear them through his powers of recall. I too am young again. Two children sharing a sled suddenly, organically, appear to be characters in our heritage along with Major Appleton, Edmund Andros, the Sachem, and the Sagamore.

Tom captures moods, scenes, and memories using observation skill that is warmly welcoming. His voice is often poignant, sometimes mystical, yet never obtuse. There is wisdom in his style.

From Nathan D. Horowitz:

What makes Tom Sheehan’s short story “Fahrenheit, Electricity, and a Flexible Flyer” so interesting is the motion of the sled-ride and the awakening sexuality, like a match being scraped—and at the same time all the associated memories zig-zagging across it, vivid and fast.

*** “above the Iron Works from 1636 leaving figures and ideas larger than fossils on the land”—I imagine immense old lumps or blobs or symbols of iron littering the landscape, thinking up at me as I walk past. “Larger than fossils” is wonderful, and the Iron Works must have left ideas on the land, true.

*** “and me on top of Theda Burton’s back side and she is bumping and bouncing and being electrically delightful as we are on a Flexible Flyer sled rushing down Bridge Street toward the bridge”—Ah! Here we are, living the promise of the title; as a reader, one experiences desire and fear and exhilaration. The long bouncing phrase feels like the fast, smooth/bumpy rush of the sled ride itself. And there’s this mad delicious mix of sledding and ass.

*** “even where the river is banked by reeds like fire arrows at the ready and love-lies-bleeding and aruthusa

bulbosa and secret flowers with Latin names I haven't correctly pronounced yet"—yeah, and that's the intimate detail of this portrait of a place that we like, and its resonance with the mood of the poem—the sexual banquet of nature, the love-fe(a)st of nature.

If I went searching for it, I don't know where I'd find it, this feeling of wonder, this new awe. Dante had this problem when writing the *Divine Comedy*—that stuff he wrote about Heaven was much duller than stuff he wrote about Hell.

From David Hartley:

Raymond Souland Jr.'s ninth letter to the President piqued my interest. In the opening paragraphs he states that his support for Obama reached a nadir, and he acknowledged the romantic illusion of his political ascension. I would like to give Mr. Souland my support for what I know is a bitter button to chew, swallow, and keep down.

However, after he quotes Mr. Obama regarding the Paris Climate Change Conference, ("I am a big believer that the imagination can solve problems"), he seems to backpedal into the "yes we can" idealism that had everyone smitten with "change" in '08 and beyond. I think he may have tacitly implied that the gulf between illusion and reality may be actual and discernible, at least in theory.

On Obama: Let's consider the possibility that romantic illusion is the only reality that is there is. I know this sounds simplistic and illogical, but when I compare words

with deeds on a template of moral, legal, and scientific values, I can't really draw any other conclusion.

Romantic illusion is the essential oil that lubricates the political, religious, economic, and the social machine as a whole. It also weighs heavily in our relationships, careers, etc. The very nature of the ego has also become a romantic illusion. The President isn't our leader. "Yes We Can" has no tangible meaning.

I am advocating here for something beyond semantics. My old friend used to say: "cannibals elect cannibal kings." The President is projection/reflection of the collective romantic illusion we all live in and contribute to. The more effectively the projected is reflected, the better the President polls. There isn't much objectivity going on.

What makes President Obama, now in his eighth year in office, beloved by some, hated by others, and everything in between? Emotions, that's how. *Romantic illusion is rooted in emotion*. A great speech is an emotional speech. A great musician/writer/communicator is emotionally stirring.

However, politicians are contractors, not artists. The government is not the people. The government is a machine, like a giant traffic lamp. The government doesn't represent anyone or anything. The flag has nothing to do with the government. The flag represents the republic.

The republic has nothing to do with the government. They could shut down the government again forever, and we would still be a republic. A precarious republic perhaps, but not any other thing until the Constitution is repealed.

From Charlie Beyer:

I liked Raymond Soulard Jr.'s Scriptor Press history ("Secret Joy Amongst These Times"), & agree with him about the Burning Man Arts Festival. How much effort and money do we dump in there for the amusement of the idle and the entitled? This place is a great platform for social change—political venues should be included too, as well as socially responsible open classes and projects, like making solar cookers for Africa or water filters for S. America. *Something* other than hedonistic display.

I love the human body as much as the next guy, but all these cloistered youth thinking they are doing something relevant by taking off their clothes is missing the point and the opportunity to do something real.

I see it as a commercial waste of time. The art there is understated and irrelevant in the face of vagina inspections and swinging dick parades.

From Judih Haggai:

In her poem "Details," Martina Newberry paints a whole history in a wisp of phrases.

*her friends watched her
take terrible risks*

How many between-the-lines details can the reader fill in? How willingly I offer those details to the heroine of the piece! This is part of Martina's talent—to engage the reader—to pull the attention into the scene, painlessly—a reader wants to be pulled. That's the delicacy of Martina's talent.

The painting builds with facts of life events (new lovers, new liabilities), countered with microwave popcorn and sci-fi movies.

*her arms and face had been free
of bruises for three months*

How exact is that line break?—her arms and face had been *free*. We feel her new life, her release from him. Yes, he had anger, but it "*had spent itself elsewhere*." Free, indeed! And her gift to him of "*one turgid case/ of the flu*." Brilliant!

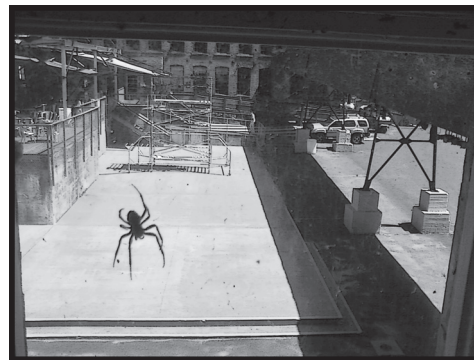
And so another Newberry piece walks by my door, catches my attention, stays awhile and, upon departure, leaves me feeling better! Thank you, Martina!

From Colin James:

I particularly enjoyed this haiku by Judih Haggai:

*this moment
the quiet paths
surround me*

This poem gave me a sense of peace.







Time Asymmetric

The dogma goes thus
 Effect after cause
 It would be a fuss
 To break such firm laws

But time is symmetric
 Or so they have told us
 Mathematics eclectic
 Would therefore not scold us

Were we to presume
 That effect could precede
 Cause—can we assume
 That Nature would concede?

The future could reach
 Back into the past
 Would this be a breach
 Of a universe vast?

Perhaps multiversal
 Principles inhere thusly
 A stark role-reversal
 What about causes must be?

If indeed the whole concept
 Is rough and provisional
 Then perhaps such a precept
 Is at most conditional

* * *

Material Spirit

Mass-energy, time
 Negentropy, mind
 What here is constant?
 Impossible, blind

Neurogenetic
 Groping, frenetic
 How does it get there?
 Random, pathetic

Teleology, no?
 That make it go?
 What is the purpose?
 And wherefore so slow?

Questions, the best
 Is how I can test
 The answers don't matter
 The matter won't rest

Material spirit
 Who then can hear it?
 It's not too expensive
 Quantum, to smear it

No difference between
 The dichotomy seen
 Is naught but confusion
 In a nightmarish dream

* * *

Copenhagen

Observer fundamental
 Precision instrumental
 Apparatus breakdown
 Ingenuity then renown

Philosophical agnostic
 Religious diagnostic
 The “real” isn’t found here
 The truth? It isn’t near

First complementarity
 Now subversive temerity
 Where does one draw the line?
 Measurements so sublime

Lunar disappearance
 The cynics given clearance
 Someone go kill the cat
 Or did it live? What’s wrong with that?!

Reason dismissed
 Restore it! It is missed!
 Will we ever get it back?
 Did we kill, or miff, the cat?

* * *

Cloudburst

Thunderclouds enshroud the mountain
Tall pines barely seen
Raining high but dry below
The gray envelops the green

Lightning strikes, a flash, a peal
The canine jumps at the crack
A misting vapor one commences to feel
And the sky goes from graying to black

Heavyset drops begin to pour down
The city all set to get drenched
Away up above, an anvil, a crown
Down here the dry dirt being quenched

Cyclical music, playing out on all Earth
The melody cool and moist
A beautiful symphony, without which a dearth
Of Earth's living creatures to hoist

Out there on the plain, away from the hype
One can see light strikes forever
It's almost as if the magic grows ripe
While I lie in my nest in the heather

* * * * *

Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Notes from New England

[Commentary]

*“Please accept this ragged purse
of high notes.”*

The following continues the series originally called Notes from New England, begun in issue 24-25 (Winter 1998), then revived in issue 59 (October 2006) as Notes from the Northwest, & appearing since issue 75 (October 2010) under its original title. It is intended as a gathering-place for observations of various lengths upon the world around me. It will be culled, like much of my writing, from my notebooks, and perhaps these thoughts will be expanded upon sometimes as well.

“Today I Live in New Britain, Again” Walking Tour of New Britain, Connecticut

December 15, 2015

8:44 a.m.

La Quinta Inn—

Rm 221—armchair

Hotel rooms & beds are a challenge, of themselves & because what's outside the door is odd, novel, unknown. The light comes in differently from one's home; the random sounds. The reach for the clock, the light; the path to the bathroom. Need for sleep is the same even if everything else isn't.

Today, once ready, my path a circuitous one through this faded working class industrial New England city, to places I knew well, but long ago. I lived here from when I was 21 to 28, mostly to go to the local college. I moved here from the smaller town next to it, Newington, where I had lived out some really rough teenage years. Even before I came to live here, New Britain was one of the places I would come to escape for a while. My connection to it is deep & long-lived.

So today I live in New Britain, again. Time to see what old dust raises within. A walking tour of Yesterdayland.



La Quinta Inn



View from Rail Bench



Rosie O'Grady's



404 Park Street

11:34 a.m.
Columbus Plaza
Bench at train tracks

Near me is an old shopping plaza where I used to get my groceries & do my laundry. Had a big Blockbuster Video, when those were big in the '80s; now it's a thrift store. Chinese restaurant is still there.

I'm sitting on an old wooden bench attached to what might be a train signal-switching box. I'd come out & sit on this bench & write while waiting for my laundry. I can see by the strew 'round me that many others came out here with nips & pints of liquor. Funny.

It's by a busy intersection, near this bench, but hidden some by a brick wall. More so at night than near noon, of course. Been at least 23 years since I sat here. Time has passed. Little else has changed, at least visibly.

11:53 a.m.
Park Street

A few blocks of walking, & come to dead end of this street where was an old bikers' bar called Rosie O'Grady's. Booths in one room, angel hanging from the ceiling over the bar, old toys & furniture in the rafters; th'other was a stage & pool room—loud garage rock by Fang on weekends—was a fun, strange, lovely weird place—it went out of business long ago—looks now like a simple 3-floor apartment building—

so many good drunks there with my old brothers—even danced with a girlfriend there once—well then—

12:20 p.m.
in front of 404 Park Street

Been since early '92 that I left here, after 7 years of living in that 3rd floor apartment up there. The last place I lived on my own in Connecticut before leaving. Just stumbling distance from good drunks at Rosie's. Still neat & trim, & you wouldn't notice it twice if it wasn't important to you—



Along Path to CCSU



Roma's



CCSU Willard Hall 3rd Floor



CCSU Game Room

1:48 p.m.
*Central Connecticut State University—
 Student Center—
 table near game room*

Walked 45 minutes from my old apartment building through the circuitous route of streets to make it to this campus—where I arrived, aged 18, knowing utterly nothing of the world—& here I began to learn, slowly, sloppily—& the massive empty spaces in my mind began to fill—

En route here, veered off to go walk by Roma Restaurant, home of the Jellicle Literary Guild from 1988 to 2001—no longer just a workingman's bar with a back room restaurant, now a vast sports complex with a million TVs & a back deck—

I've come from my present moment back in 2015 through some kind of memory warp, to some kind of past-now, encountering revisions of places I knew—what's the same, what's kinda the same, what's here now—

I found the Willard Hall building, 3rd floor, where I spent 6 years as an undergraduate & graduate English major—its yellow & grey halls were virtually unchanged. It's funny that though I spent 4½ more years in academics, up in Boston, at two different more well-known colleges (Northeastern U. & Emerson College), it was here that my deepest & best habits were formed, thinking & writing habits both—

And so come here to this Student Center, completely renovated, very nice, & I see the literary magazine *The Helix*, which I once edited, published my early poetry & fiction, now has some office space. Shared with *The Recorder*, the campus newspaper I wrote for many times. I feel these spaces, as changed as they are, in my bones, the memories my bones carry—I learned how to work with others on publications, how to solicit materials, how to assemble an issue technically & aesthetically—my abilities to do *The Cenacle* now were developed in part here, those many years back—

Even the college radio station, WFCS, is still kicking here, nicer studio with a window to hallway—learned how to DJ a show here—might never have been a “Within's Within” or a SpiritPlants Radio if I hadn't started here—

I look at these places & a part of me yearns to touch again—find a renewed border somehow—not just sentiment, but new live connection—

The hard thing is that there *is* no easy path to re-connection. That needs time, proximity, & purpose—otherwise one is just passing by with memories, sentiment—

What I feel like, in a way, is a sort of specter, here & not-here both, wondering what all those years around this place meant—or, asking it another way—what of all the people I knew then?—they lived on without me, from some point, & I them—



The Place



The Place



The Place



The Place

What am I wishing to re-connect with anyway? The times? The people? Myself?

The clock was always ticking then toward graduation, & the worry of having to get a job. I did, somehow, & it wasn't very good, an office job in nearby Hartford, but it paid my rent, & so I moved on awhile.

Then, about a year after graduating, I decided to return here for an MA in English, & stayed around another two years till I quit, & stumbled back into the working world. Another mediocre office job. A big romance, & its bust.

Then I moved to Boston & back to academics. Graduated this time with that MA in English (NU), then worked at a bookstore for three years. And then *back* to school for an MA in Publishing & Writing (Emerson). Finished that in 1999, & not been back since. It's been 16 years this month.

It's like I graduated from academics in 1999 to the Burning Man Festival, & stuck with that for 11 years.

Now I have no formal affiliation like those. I miss it, in a way. Yet nothing new clearly presents itself.

It's nice being here, though only a little while, & no interactions with anyone. The pool tables in the game room are all taken. Are fall exams over? Strange.

It's funny that there are at least two New Britains. This campus is one, distinct from the rest of the city. The downtown is fairly poor, old. And I guess the many neighborhoods would be a third. But this school has as little directly to do with the rest as it ever has.

It's unsettling to see all the changes here, yet they are improvements, all in all. It's a nicer campus. A beautiful broad walkway runs through the campus, where once was a trafficked road. That can't be a bad thing. And though it's a small & rare connection I am making today, it's valid.

3:24 p.m.
CCSU Burritt Library—
3rd floor stacks

OK, another home of mine back then. The entrance is on the first floor now, not exterior up a flight of stone stairs. Computers & coffee on arrival, but one elevator ride & it's miles of books on old metal racks. Some things remain.

Now I can leave.

4:29 p.m.

The Place

Been a quarter century since I've been here, discovered when I was about 18 years old, this hidden Place by the stream that flows under the bridge, where often I passed back & forth to get to that college just visited—now overgrown as fuck out here but I found a way in & glad of it—perfect, little changed—

There were times of year when it was pretty low, the stream—I came here a lot back then, different seasons of the year—to hide from the bullshit of my life—family struggles—came here for time with Art—to write & to read—I'd sometimes bike here & spend hours alone, with a soda & sandwich from a nearby store—a peculiar picnic for my peculiar soul—

I had so little nature in my life then—Nature, wild, interesting, not just vague backdrop to human dramas—I'd always wanted the Green, been among it, but never focused on it before I came here—it was secret, it was *mine*—nobody knew where I was when I came here—even as I was (& am now) just below the many racing cars going by—

There was a car dealership nearby here, long gone—there were always calls on the loudspeaker for the sales people out in the lot—other times I heard in the distance the cheers & scores from high school football games—

Even when I didn't come here so often anymore, I thought of it like a friend—it became a lingering place in my imagination even years later—enough to revisit today as part of this walking tour—

Not about people, unlike the other places I've seen again today, so not sad over loss & passing time here. Never was high here before. This feels like the climax of my walking tour today—

Perfection—————

*shimmering branches in the water
massive cement girders above
this rocky hill
that one over the water too
graffiti both sides
bird chatter
distant buildings
perpetual car whoosh*

Before it ended, he had a dream, or maybe not, of a stream, pushing through thorns & vines to it, & come under a great bridge & for a moment all still, his heart calm, just birds, just ripples

just passing light & cloud

 12/15/2015

Judih Haggai

wind dies down
leaves in puddles
pine branch surrenders

* * *

superhero
saves the needy
in her dreams

* * *

amongst the crowd
one disbeliever
in search of a friend

* * *

thought after thought
down a highway
time to let go

* * *

winter promises
sleep for six months
good to be a bear

* * *

pen in hand
nothing to say
but a smile

* * *

from this window
the world passes by
moons and centipedes

* * *

old lady scarecrow
one-time puppet
guardian of kale

* * *

one short rainfall
the smell of daisies
from plowed fields

* * *

calm surveillance
attention to detail
everything changes

* * *

words of wisdom
again and again
may i get closer

* * *

all the noise
dissolves in an instant
by the turquoise sea

* * * * *



The Paintings of Darren Grave

[Fiction]

There was something uniquely compelling about the sad-eyed watercolor portraits Darren Grave painted. Each told a story of an injured heart as they stared out, mute, still, trapped in their two-dimensional glassed prisons.

Whether a ballplayer on the losing team, a jilted bride-to-be stranded at the altar, or some poor soul alone on Christmas morning—one could not fail to experience pathos looking at Darren Grave’s evocative works. Their somber hues spread tragedy beyond the frames to burden any who saw them with gut-wrenching compassion.

Some found Darren Grave’s style reminiscent of Fritz Klemmer—absent Klemmer’s eroticism. A few imagined he was influenced by Anya Tülko—minus Tülko’s schizoid neuroses. However, Grave was truly *sui generis*. He was alone and inimitable in his watercolor world. Many suspected he employed a special technique or ingredient which distinguished his efforts.

Yet he did not paint many portraits.

He did not paint often.

He only painted when green reappeared after winter.

When flowers blossomed again.

When April rains came.

Perhaps Grave could only capture that desolation in those forlorn faces when Nature was exulting, celebrating Spring. Perhaps Grave needed joy outside to counter the interior moods he depicted.

People guessed because Muses speak in cryptic tongues.

Darren Grave’s paintings of people on the edge of tears never failed to bring people to tears.

It would take an envious, ambitious artist of minimal skill to expose the strange reality underlying the mysterious paintings of Darren Grave.

The kindest remark ever heard about Basil Wallhard’s early paintings was that they were best appreciated by the blind.

Basil Wallhard’s entry at one Annual Community Art Exhibition met sneering derision, while Darren Grave’s, as always, won a ribbon and praise. During that post-Exhibition reception, jealous Wallhard, taking advantage of Grave’s weaknesses for flattery and cocktails, initiated an investigative “friendship,” intent on discovering Grave’s secret.

On a compliments-and-booze-soaked evening some months later, the patient Wallhard’s nefarious plan at last bore fruit when a liquored up Darren Grave confessed the weird secret of his paintings!

“Yeah, I only paint in Spring,” Graves smiled. “This is why: I sneak into local Senior Proms with my handkerchiefs and Smucker’s jelly jars. When the Prom Queens are announced, I scurry about and I wipe away all the tears of the hysterical losers and their sympathetic girlfriends with my hankies. There’s a Biblical flood of tears. It’s hilarious.

“Then I squeeze the tears into the jelly jars, rush home, mix my watercolors with the moisture I’ve collected, and paint like crazy. That’s how I do it. I paint with tears. There’s something special about the salty tears of crushed teenage girls that make my paintings really bleak,” Grave finished, grinning, hiccupping.

“God damn Darren Grave to hell!” thought Basil Wallhard as he wrestled with the artistic process in his studio one fateful subsequent night. Frustrated, he blended his colors, swore, stomped his feet.

A thick gob of spittle fell from his lips to his palette. It mingled, running amidst the acrylics in a most fascinating way. From such serendipities, hidden possibilities emerged.

Wallhard began to heave and propel stringy gooey gobs of snot with wild abandon, painting feverishly, inspired into an apoplectic frenzy of viscous phlegm, from which rainbows exploded, spastic, kaleidoscopic bursts of pigment and salival slobber.

His brushes flailed. His canvas dripped slime. Party-colored gunk took form. Wallhard expectorated. Wallhard created.

Possessed, he spat his animosity at the canvas. Art happened. Wallhard was transported. It was wonderful.

He hocked a final quivering loogie into the corner, and signed his name.

Basil Wallhard had accidentally discovered his own signature method: his pleural congestion proving to be the semi-liquid philosopher’s stone which transmuted a base talent into something to take one’s breath away.

Yes, it was messy . . . Yes, it was unsanitary and possibly virulent . . . Yes, it was disgusting. But at least it did not involve distraught teenage girls with handkerchiefs, and Smucker’s jelly jars. Or others’ body fluids . . .

Wallhard began to produce portraits with newfound confidence. These accumulated, soon to be displayed. This fluid, confrontational approach of Basil Wallhard’s mucus period guaranteed he would experience something of the notoriety achieved by his despised rival.

People absolutely hated his hate-filled subjects. His angry paintings generated a lot of fury, and a lot of bad press, and no sales.

One of his canvases, “Feral Soccer Mom,” was even awarded a (possibly tongue-in-cheek) black-and-blue ribbon at the Annual Exhibition.

Basil Wallhard, now totally mad, believed he had triumphed over the creepy Darren Grave, who continued to elude authorities and varsity football fists in the name of Art.

Martina Newberry

Language

Here is this world I've made of words and gestures
and the alphabetics of the gene pool.

What are our choices here on this planet of
syllables? There is pain, and a road leading

to deathlessness, and the explosions on the
small bed where two lovers—both long-haired and slim—

twist in sequence. Here is this world I've made of
words and signals written on a mandala

so carefully, with such focus, knowing the
impermanence, the destruction that follows.

For the sake of this world, I continue to
commit the sin of waxing incoherent,

and the sin of percussive adjectives, and
the sin of describing what has been described

too many times already. Still, forgive me.
I keep remembering that steep hill where I

looked down on a beekeeper's field of white hives,
and the roadside stop where Kudzu had swallowed

a tractor, a tool shed, and a chicken coop,
and I had to shove them into phrases.

I've spoken this world of bleak Octobers and
the voluminous assault of summer.

I've manipulated the language of mischief,
and the grammar of rage and loss and,

even in the red shame of my own audacity,
I still can't stop remembering the evening

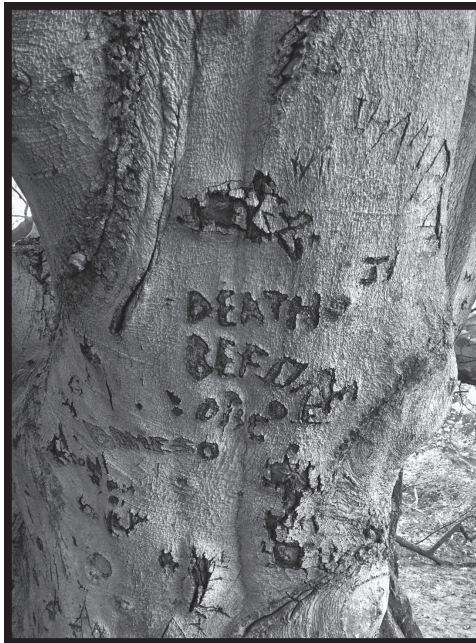
I watched ragged webs of clouds on a night
too early for stars, how that night, the god of

street lights and the moths that dance to die in those
lights brought dark finally—acre after acre

of darkness—like these words I offer you now—
unattached, floating, holding its breath waiting

for me to bury the proper language of the learned
and tell it to you the only way I know.

* * * * *





Bags End Book #4: The Bunny Pillow Crusade!

Introduction

Hello Cenacle readers,

Mah name is Algernon Beagle & I am the editor guy for Bags End News. Bags End News is a newspaper about mah homeland, a fantasyland called Bags End.

From the outside, Bags End looks like 3 brown-colored laundry bags piled up on a little chair in the corner of our friend Miss Chris's bedroom in Connecticut. Miss Chris is 5 years old & has a toy tall boy brother named Ramie, who is 17.

Inside, Bags End is sort of like an apartment building of levels but, cuz it is a fantasyland, nobody knows about its top or bottom. Most levels look like regular hallways, with doors to rooms & other places running up & down their lengths.

Each level is connected to the one above & the one below by ramps that are good for folks with legs & others without. Strangely, the other end of each level ends in a sudden edge, so be warned, should you come to visit.

The Cenacle editor guy, who is a cousin to my friend & Miss Chris's brother Ramie, invited me to share some of the stories from mah newspaper, now & again. He also helped with the typing & some of the spellings, to make this book presentable here. I love English but I still don't spell it too great.

Anyway, I hope you enjoy these stories from Bags End, a place near & dear to mah heartbone.

The Bunny Pillow Crusade!

Part I.

The story I am going to tell you this time, dear readers, has to do with that strange & often grumpy pillow named Betsy Bunny Pillow. She & her crazed doings often make the headlines of mah newspaper, though I will say that rarely do I make it through the reportings of these stories without damage to mah body & mah brainbone both.

As I have writed in mah other books, Betsy is one of the strangest Friends in Bags End. She is a Pillow, which is not strange, but she talks, which is. Betsy came to Bags End a long time ago as an escapee from a place called the Bunny Pillow Farm, which is run by Farmer Jones. Jones grows Bunny Pillows in big fields, & then sells them off to rich people, which drives Betsy crazy.

She is called a Bunny Pillow cuz she bounces when she goes along, & also maybe cuz her Pillow case dress has pictures of bunnies on it. Her voice is only a whisper, but you better not ignore her or you risk getting smothered.

Betsy leads a shadowy group called the Allies, who I don't really know much about, except Betsy is their leader, & they always help her try to attack the Bunny Pillow Farm to liberate it. And always fail so far.

So what happened 1 peaceful day was that me & Sheila Bunny & Godd were taking little naps in Sheila's Throne Room. Sheila is really only Mayor of Bags End, but she calls herself King, Emperor, & a lot of other titles for her big guy amusements. Still, she is mah adopted sister, & a pretty good fella all in all.

Godd looks like a little pink bear with a nice red heart on Godd's chest.

Bags End News
 No. 189 June 19, 1990
 + Editor: Algernon Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunny
 Written Down By: Lori Bunny

The Buny Pillo Croosad! (Part 1.

Last tim I tolja bowt how
 Godd waz now living in Bagzend
 an that Betsee Buny Pillo waz
 bringing Godd along on her latist
 crazy attemptt too defeet Farmr
 Joneses and liberat the Buny Pillo
 Farm.

So Betsee waz now leeding her
 Allis an me an Godd an som
 othr Bagzend gys on the march
 too Joneses farm. Shlela waz along
 too but she was on her Bunycikel
 an wood ror awff the dert rode
 we wer on an intoa the neerby
 feelds an ~~woods~~ woods too hav
 advenchurs of her own. The Blandys
 wer alleng too but thay kept

Godd is even littler than Sheila. Godd was visiting us in Bags End, taking a little vacation from work.

So in bounces Betsy Bunny Pillow. She goes right up to Godd & says in her whispery voice, "Hey, Godd! I would like to talk to you."

Godd opened 1 eye & said, "I am too sleepy to talk."

Betsy got mad & said, "Listen, deity, if you're gonna cut it around here, you better understand this. My Allies take very poorly to rudeness. You wouldn't want to disappear in the night, would you?"

Boy! I wouldn't talk to Godd that way! Then again, I am a veteran coward.

Sheila, who was slouched down in her Throne, opened a single purple eye & said, "Listen, Pillow, I can guess what you're going to ask & I can guarantee you're not gonna get it."

"Bite it, Bunny!" Betsy screamed in her whispery voice. "Godd, I want you to march with me & my Allies as we overrun the criminal Farmer Jones' Bunny Pillow Slave Farm & liberate the captives held there!"

Godd opened both eyes this time. "Sure, but later when I am rested."

This woke everyone up. I hid behind Sheila's Throne cuz this was all too scary for me.

"I thought you didn't interfere in such things!" said Sheila.

"I don't," said Godd. "I will go with Betsy but I won't raise a paw to harm Jones. Truth is, I kind of want to meet him."

Betsy was real real mad. "I don't want an observer! I want an angry avenging Godd filled with wrath over the injustices done by Man against his fellow Pillow! I want the roar of thunder! The plague of locusts! The destruction of the wicked!"

"Sorry," said Godd, & then went back to sleep.

Well, I guess Betsy thought it over & decided that a non-interfering Godd is better than none at all.

"OK, Godd," Betsy said. "You will receive your instructions shortly. I expect you to be present & prepared at the place & time I order." Then she turned & bounced out of the room without another word.

I came out from behind the Throne & saw Sheila had already fallen asleep again & Good was about to do the same. Boy! I wish I could be a brave fella like them! Betsy scares every bone in my beagle body.

"What's wrong, Algernon?" asked Godd.

"That Betsy scares me a lot," I said. "And her Allies too."

"Betsy's OK," said Godd. "By the way, are you coming on the march to get the story for your newspaper?"

"Of course," I said. "But it's the kind of story I am not very happy doing."

Godd crawled under my ear blanket & said, "It will be fine, Algernon. Now let's sleep." Godd kinda reminds me of a Lazybug like that Ramie the Toy Tall Boy.

Anyway, the day came for the march on the Bunny Pillow Farm. Betsy ordered everyone to go through a certain door & to wait in the field beyond it.

The Allies were all lined up like an Army. They wore uniforms that were blue & had bunnies & flowers on them, just like Betsy's pillow case dress. Me & Godd & the Blondys, who are 3 nice magic girls, & a few others stood nearby waiting for the march to begin.

Betsy came bouncing in wearing dark glasses on her no-face & a sort of leather thing over her dress. She looked scary & silly at the same time.

"Troops, distinguished visitors, & other hanger-on beagle types--"

"Hey!" I yelled.

"This shall be our moment of greatest triumph! For too long have our people been held captive by the evil enemy Jones! The time has come for the glory of liberation, & the annihilation of the wicked! Together, we shall march forth into the golden rays of--"

The rest of Betsy's speech was cut off by a loud roar, & Sheila Bunny came roaring up on her BunncyCycle Beatrix!

"What's the delay? Let's cruise!" yelled Sheila.

I thought Betsy was gonna get really mad but she said instead, "Now is the time! Onward to vanquish Jones!"

XXXXXX

The Bunny Pillow Crusade!
Part II.

So off we marched, Betsy leading her Allies, & me, & Godd the small pink bear, & some other Bags End guys, all on the march to Farmer Jones' Bunny Pillow Farm. Sheila was along too, but she was on her BunnyCycle & would roar off the dirt road we were on & into nearby fields to have adventures of her own. The Blondys were along too, but they kept floating away & getting lost.

That silly red-haired baby Sargent Lisa-Marie Chow was along too but she told me it was only as a "mwilitwery advwisor." She & Betsy would talk about strategy but it would always end up in a fight.

"Listen, you stupid baby, I want Jones' farm to burn, baby, burn! I want him hung out to dry! No surrender will be accepted! I want him planted in the earth till he is ripe & then sold to the lowest bidder!" whisper screamed Betsy.

"You dwumb pwillow! Jones would swerve you better as a vwanquished pwisoner in Bwags End. You may even cweate a bwacklash of swympathy fwor him if he is hwurt!" said Lisa.

Sheila heard all this & said, "I think you're both nuts. Lisa, Jones is not gonna to live in Bags End. And Betsy, if you hurt him, you're not gonna live in Bags End! So you better come up with another plan!" Then she roared off to have another adventure. I asked her to tell me about her adventures, but all she would do is laugh & say, "If I told you, your newspaper might not be fit for general consumption."

Mah silly bumping brother Alexander Puppy & that nice language-knowing guy Allie Leopard were along too. I don't know why Alex would come on an invasion but he came last time. Allie said he made Betsy agree to certain Bump Conventions of War. What these silly things are, I didn't bother to ask.

I was telling Godd about the last time Betsy led an attack on the Bunny Pillow Farm. It was the time when the Blondys made Sheila try to solve people's problems in Bags End, & Betsy had demanded that Sheila lead an attack on Farmer Jones.

It had failed like all the rest with the one change being that Jones had gotten Sheila mad at him. So even though Sheila & Betsy usually don't get along, they both dislike Jones & this was why Sheila had come along.

"What would Betsy do if she ever defeated Jones?" asked Godd. Cuz Godd is such a little pink bear, I had to walk slowly to not get ahead of Godd. We were behind everyone else.

"I don't know. I think Betsy needs a cause. I mean, she spends all the time preparing to attack Jones. If she won, she would probably get bored & need some other battle to fight," I said.

"It's kind of a crusade for her," said Godd.

"What's that?" I asked.

"It's a kind of march in the name of some noble or holy cause. Betsy is leading an attack that is for her the most important thing in her--"

"Listen, you shrimp of a deity & you stupid puppy, you better keep up or my Allies will deal out their own special brand of justice to you!" whisper screamed a suddenly here Betsy.

"You're pretty rude to Godd," I muttered as Godd got on mah back & we hurried along.

Betsy looked like she was gonna attack me when Sheila roared into view on Beatrix & yelled, "Hey, Pillow, the enemy is just beyond the next hill!"

Betsy forgot me & Godd & did something I would be afraid to dream of even in mah worst nightmares. She bounced on the back of Sheila's BunnyCycle & whisper yelled, "Let's fly!" And off they flew on down the road!

"Boy!" I muttered, "I never thought I would see Sheila & Betsy team up."

"It probably won't last," said Godd with a small chuckle.

Pretty soon we reached the top of the hill with everyone else.

Betsy talked to us all then. "My plan is simple & direct. Sheila & I will roar through the fields & incite my brother & sister Pillows to rise up & free themselves. We will lead them here to this hill & you will bring them back to Bags End. If necessary, I will stay behind & battle Jones to the end to save my people. Jones & I may go down together, but my people will be freed!" she whisper screamed.

Well, you don't have to be a cowardist like your old pal Algernon to be scared by this speech. When nobody objected to this crazy plan, I summoned what dustballs of courage I have & said, "But Betsy, there must be another way. You may not like me & you may be mean & grumpy, but I don't want to see you destroyed."

Betsy looked at me & said, "Thank you, beagle. Nobody else has tried to stop me because I will not be stopped anymore. You actually said something caring. OK, Sheila, let's go!"

So Betsy & Sheila roared down the hill & soon were racing through the fields & fields of Bunny Pillows. I heard Betsy whisper screaming & Sheila yelling & then I saw Bunny Pillows moving! They were bouncing toward us, hundreds of them! It was like a huge crowd of Betsys bouncing toward us!

Pretty soon we were surrounded by all these Bunny Pillows. It was kind of crowded on that hill & I couldn't see what was going on with Betsy & Sheila. I still had Godd on mah back & together we made our way through the crowds.

Even though there were a lot of these pillows, none of them said anything, which I thought was pretty strange. Also, none of them had any clothes on like Betsy has her dress. I guess Miss Chris must have given Betsy that dress when she escaped to Connecticut.

Finally me & Godd got beyond the Bunny Pillows to see what was happening.

Just in time. Sheila & Betsy were roaring right at Jones! O! I was so scared I probably broke mah own record.

Jones sidestepped the BunnyCycle & it raced by him. But he didn't just stand there. He ran after it with his big legs running fast & his hands stretched out.

Betsy looked back & saw Jones catching up & she screamed at Sheila, probably to go faster. Sheila did but Jones caught hold the back of the bike!

The Bunny Pillow Crusade!

Part III.

Me & mah little pink bear pal Godd crept as close as mah cowardly bones would allow me to.

"Let my people go!" whisper screamed Betsy as she bounced off Sheila's BunnyCycle. Jones was distracted by this & so Sheila raced out of his grasp & away from him, near to Betsy. She turned around to face him from a little distance. There she waited.

"But Betsy, look around you! The Pillows are freed!" Jones said. "They wait on the hill for you to lead them away! I have repented, Betsy, & shall never sell another Pillow again! I am packing to leave because the Bunny Pillows can grow in these fields without me. And I am sure that, when you take charge, you will have Pillow Sitters to watch them as they grow."

Well, I don't trust Jones at all & I thought there was a trick going on somewhere. I guess Sheila did too because she started to say, "Listen, Jones, if you think--"

"Never mind him! My people are free!" Betsy cried. "It is the day of liberation! Let's go, Sheila, & greet my people!"

Who was Sheila to argue? I don't think she really cared all that much. So she helped Betsy onto Beatrix, blew some dirt in Jones' face from her wheels, & went racing up the hill to where a huge crowd of Pillows were.

Betsy leaped off the BunnyCycle & talked to her people. "This is a glorious day in the history of Bunny Pillows. The evil Farmer Jones has been vanquished without loss of life, & now all of you shall be escorted to Bags End, the place that offered me shelter as I battled in exile to free all of you. There you shall meet Miss Chris, my host & benefactor, to who we all owe our freedom. After that, I will depart Bags End for good, & lead you all back here to establish in full & lasting glory the Free State of Bunny Pillows!"

The huge crowd of Pillows didn't say nothing but looked like they were listening & waiting Betsy's command.

"Hey, Pillow, how come your people are so quiet?" asked Sheila.

"They're scared! They feel that they've been traded from 1 dictator to another. They don't realize that I want to free them, not rule them. Come along, people!" Betsy whisper yelled.

So Betsy Bunny Pillow led her large group of silent followers on the road back to Bags End, & the rest of us guys followed her.

Me & mah little shrimpy pal Godd were way in back of everyone else.

"I don't have a good feeling about this," I muttered to Godd.

"Let it be, Algernon. Betsy has to learn her own lessons," said Godd.

"Aren't you being kind of fatalistic, pal?" I asked.

"You couldn't tell Betsy a thing, even if you wanted to," said Godd with a small chuckle.

How true.

The next few days were really weird. Betsy led her followers all around Bags End, where Betsy said she had lived in exile, whatever that means. I think Betsy was kind of disappointed that they never talked, but she acted just as bold & crazy as ever.

Then one day me & Godd were in Sheila's Throne Room, & us & Sheila were taking little naps. In bounces Betsy Bunny Pillow & she's all alone.

"I have come to say I am leaving tomorrow & I won't be back. I am returning with my people to the newly liberated Bunny Pillow Free State," she announced.

Sheila opened one of her purple eyes. "Well, it's been & I guess it won't be anymore. Goodbye." Then she went back to sleep.

"Goodbye, Betsy. I am glad you finally achieved your megalomaniacal dreams," I said in mah friendly Algernon way.

"See ya, beagle. You always were just a stupid interfering puppy but, well, you never really stood in my way," said Betsy in a almost nice way.

"What about your Allies?" asked Godd the small pink bear.

"They have been released from my services & been given high recommendations. They served me well, but I cannot take them along, of course. The Bunny Pillow Free State is for Bunny Pillows only."

The next morning, Betsy Bunny Pillow & her people were ready to leave. All of Bags End, lots & lots of guys & fellas, came out to this big field through 1 of the doorways in Bags End to say goodbye to Betsy.

"Residents of Bags End, my place of exile, I say goodbye for the last time. Since I will never come back here, & none of you are allowed into the Bunny Pillow Free State, this is it. You have been witness to the founding of a great new land & as such, should feel honored," Betsy whispered. Her dress was covered with medals & honorary pins which Miss Chris gaved her so she would look like a great leader.

Some Bags End guys had stuff to say too.

"Bump Bump!" said Alex & then he sat down to suck his toe sadly.

"Alexander says that even though he is not a Bunny Pillow, he would be happy to teach your people Bump Language someday," said Allie Leopard.

"Better if they say nothing," I muttered.

"Gwoodbye, stwupid Pwillow. I wather admired the efwicient way you wun your Allwiance," said Lisa-Marie Chow. Silly sergeant.

I was rather sad, very sad, & I ran to give Betsy a hug.

Betsy looked at me in a nice mean way. "Don't do it, beagle. I would hate to have to smother you before I leave." I ranned back to mah friend Godd, who laughed a little laugh.

Miss Chris showed up with Ramie & boy! was she sad! Ramie was just sleepy. She hugged Betsy for a long time.

Then Betsy & her silent crowd of Pillows went off!

The Bunny Pillow Crusade! **Grand Finally!**

This has been a very hard story for your old pal Algernon to tell. It's scary cuz it's got Betsy Bunny Pillow & Farmer Jones in it. It's not even very funny cuz

silly guys like the Blondys & Margy Bunny, & nice guys like Miss Chriss & Princess Crissy aren't in it much or at all. I hope that the next story is nicer to an old beagle journalist's frail disposition bone.

Betsy Bunny Pillow's latest attack on Farmer Jones had seemed to work. Farmer Jones had given up without a fight, & Betsy & Sheila & the rest of us Bags End guys had returned to Bags End with this big group of silent Bunny Pillows. After showing them around Bags End, Betsy had announced that she was returning to the Bunny Pillow Farm which Jones had abandoned, & she was gonna create the Bunny Pillow Free State.

After Betsy left, me & Miss Chris & Sheila & Godd the small pink bear had returned to Sheila's Thone Room. I sat in mah favorite corner, Sheila slouched down in her Throne, & Miss Chris sat on a little chair holding Godd.

Nobody said nothing for awhile. Then I speaked up. "Sheila, can I ask you a question?"

"As long as it's not a stupid one," said Sheila.

"How come it was so impossible the other times for Betsy to defeat Jones & it was so cinchy this time?" I asked.

"I was wondering about that myself," said Sheila.

"Me too," said Miss Chris. "I had a feeling something's wrong."

"I respect feelings a great deal," said Godd the small pink bear. "But what we don't have are any facts to go on."

"Well, how come those Pillows didn't say nothing?" I asked. "I mean, when Betsy came here when she escaped, she talked, whispered anyway. And the time when Betsy tried to get the pillows to escape with her, they talked that time too. I know Betsy said they were scared this time, but it still sounds sneaky."

"And how come Jones gave up? Why would he do that after all his talk about money & stuff?" asked Miss Chris.

Well, the more we talked, the more we were sure Jones had tricked Betsy & the rest of us too. We all wanted to do something but couldn't decide what to do.

Godd said, "Just remember to be sure. I think if you were wrong, Betsy would never let you forget it."

Sheila decided she would take her BunnyCycle & go spy on the Bunny Pillow Farm. Miss Chris demanded to go & save her Pillow. Since there weren't no room on the BunnyCycle, Miss Chris put on her shoulder satchel & put me & Godd the little pink bear inside.

Sheila roared us all real fast. I shut mah eyes tight & held onto Godd.

We arrived near the Bunny Pillow Farm at night. We got off the bike & sneaked close to the Farm.

"Hey! How come all those Pillows are planted again? It's like they never left at all!" I whispered.

"They never did. It was all a trick. And I bet Betsy is in there somewhere," said Sheila.

Jones' farmhouse was dark but we still sneaked quietly. Betsy was easy to find. She was the only Pillow with a blue dress on.

She was talking to herself. "And we will have separation of the branches of government. And we will grant to all Pillows the right of liberty tempered by the right of property. Each Pillow will be expected to work to his capacity & in return receive what he needs to prosper. There will be no need for money, of course. Bags End had that right anyway, & war will be unnecessary."

"Who is she talking to? And how comes she's all tied up like that to those metal posts?" I asked.

Nobody answered & Sheila & Miss Chris were already untying her. Godd told me that Jones had done very bad by tricking Betsy into thinking she had freed the Pillows, & now she was so convinced that he had tied her up without her noticing it.

"That's so mean!" I yelled.

"Shhh, Algernon!" whispered Miss Chris.

But I was too mad to be quiet. I went crazy like beagles hardly ever do. I ran through the fields of Bunny Pillows to Farmer Jones' house. I crashed through the front door & ran & found Jones in his bed. Jones sat up & yelled at me but I was too crazy to be scared.

"You dumb guy! You mean guy!!" I yelled & I bit him. Now when puppys bite people, they don't get rabys, they get babys. For an hour they think they're babys.

I finally calmed down when I saw Farmer Jones sucking his thumb & saying, "Ga ga goo goo!" Then I remembered how scared I am of everything, & I ranned away even as Baby Jones was saying, "Play with cute puppy! Nice beagle, nice A-wa-wa!"

I ran outside & there were Sheila & Miss Chris & Betsy & Godd & Sheila's BunnyCycle waiting for me.

"Come along, beagle!" yelled Sheila. She was proud of me for acting bravely. I gave mahself a strong lecture later about the foolishness of hero-ism & the virtue of a long life of cowardism.

Betsy eventually came around & realized the whole thing was a plot.

She felt kind of foolish for being tricked, but I think that the massiveness of the trick made her understand & admire Jones in a whole new way.

So the story ends & I didn't really understand it as usual. But isn't that always the way?

XXXXXX

Don Oso Antiguo Visits Bags End!

Part I

The next few days were pretty quiet in Bags End. I always get nervous when things are so calm & peaceful because I know deep down in mah beagle bones that quiet now means trouble later.

Then things got very interesting 1 day when me & Godd the small pink bear were walking home from school. We were meandering through different levels & hallways.

It's kind of funny having Godd in your class. You see, Godd can be kind of forgetful. Mister Owl the teacher asked Good a question 1 day & Godd said, "I am not sure."

"How can you not be sure?" I asked.

"Yah, I thought you were all powerful & all seeing & all knowing," whispered Betsy Bunny Pillow.

"But not all remembering," said Godd with a small chuckle. I like Godd's small chuckle.

So anyway, me & Godd were walking along when Godd got curious to see off the edge of Bags End.

"Careful, Godd! You might fall off! Then you would be lost forever!" I said, wondering what it would be like to be lost forever, & especially what would happen if Godd was lost forever.

"Look, Algernon! There's something out there!" said Godd, who was leaning over the edge. I runned & grabbed Godd back. I wondered if Godd floats like the Blondys. Probably not cuz didn't Godd pass the Law of Grabitee?

Anyway, I looked & saw something in the darkness. This was different. What I saw was sort of there & not there at the same time. Godd & me waited & in awhile it became clear what we saw. A sun, a sun?, was coming up & shining on a land made of ice. All I can say is, when you pal around with Godd, you never know what's going to happen next.

It was a short distance between us on the edge of Bags End & the beginning of the land of ice. Godd wanted to hop the space.

"Doncha mean jump it, guy?" I asked.

"No, hop it. I haven't hung around with Sheila all this time for nothing," Godd said, & before I had time to get scared & run away fast, me & Godd were hopping through the air & landing on the ice place.

I looked at Godd with a mad face. "Hey! Didn't you know that beagles can't hop?"

Godd shook Godd's head. "I forgot, I guess. It's a good thing cuz if I remembered you would be lost forever."

I shivered. I guess Godd's bad memory has certain advantages. Godd is pretty smart. Almost as smart as Sheila.

Godd caught Godd's breath & said, "Let's go."

So off me & mah friend Godd went into the place of ice beyond the edge of Bags

Bags End News
 No. 193 November 6, 1990
 Editor: Algernon Beagle
 King: Shlela Bunny
 Written Down By: Lori Bunny

Don Osa Antiguo Vizits Bagzend!

Evn tho us Bagzend gys
 keep coming an going, Ramy keeps
 teling me not too worg becaz
 the imaginashun nevr gros old
 an tird an dys. I think he iz
 jest beeing a dum old lazybug.

Enyway, lazt tim I waz
 teling about how me an Godd
 fownd this plas calld Iseland
 beyond the ege ut Bagzend an
 how we brawt bak this fat
 old bere whoo blos bubels an
 speeks a langwig calld Spanish.

Wel, wen he met Shlela,
 this fat bere calld Don Osa
 Antiguo ~~osa~~ bowd down an got
 awl humbel an stuf lik Shlela
 waz a reel king. O ya, an he

End. I wasn't too scared cuz I guess when you're with Godd, things can't go too wrong. But who can tell?

Anyway, we started walking along. There wasn't too much to see, just ice. I was kind of bored because usually adventures have more exciting parts.

Then Godd noticed something ahead of us, a funny shaped ice thing. So we went up to it & saw it was a cat made out of ice.

"Hi!" said Godd in a friendly deity kind of way.

"I don't think it can talk, Godd," I said.

"Greetings, friends," said the ice cat all of a sudden. Its eyes, now wide open, shined like purple ice. "Welcome to Iceland," he said.

"Say, isn't that near the Arctic or something?" I asked.

"Well, that may be but this is the real Iceland & it isn't located anywhere. We float from place to place in reality & fantasy & other places. Right now, we're headed for Heaven," said the ice cat.

"Hey, that's where my pal here lives," I said.

"How long will you be here near Bags End?" Godd asked suddenly.

"For awhile. It's hard to say just how long. You see, we have a rather strange, uh, mode of transport which you will discover. But for now, why don't you venture further into Iceland? It has a special kind of beauty you may grow to appreciate."

Godd motioned me to come along & so I did. We said so long to the ice cat & walked further into Iceland.

1 of the places me & Godd the small pink bear went through was the Ice Forest. It was different from regular forests cuz, first, the trees were made of ice & second, not all of them grew right side up. Some grew upside down, some grew sideways, some grew connected between the trunk of 1 tree & the trunk of another. Strange place.

Then Godd discovered how to eat fruit from the fruit ice trees. Godd saw that if the ice fruit hanging down from the branches was breathed on, the ice would melt & a fruit would fall off the tree to be caught & eaten. By the way, O! Ice fruit! Yuk!

There was a little ice town we came to with ice houses along a ice street & ice people & animals who were all very interesting except that none of them moved.

Then, all of a sudden, we came upon this fat pink bear sitting in the middle of nowhere, puffing on a pipe that would blow out soap bubbles. He had a kind of a sleepy grumpy look on his face, & he was most definitely not made from ice.

"Hi there, guy," I said in mah inimitable friendly Algernon way.

The bear looked at me for a second & then continued staring elsewhere. I have tried staring elsewhere mahself, but I never can because I don't know which direction to look in.

"Hey, fella, doncha speak English?" I said with a few speckles of grumpyness in mah voice.

As an answer, the fat pink bear turned to Godd the small pink bear & said, "Siervo, ahora estoy preparado para partir. Me ayude a montar el jamelgo."

Well, it didn't sound like English or Puppy or Bunny or El or Hebrew or any of the languages I had heard of.

"Do you know what he said, Godd?" I asked mah friend.

"Well, my Spanish is a bit rusty, especially the archaic colloquial dialect he is using, but I think he just told me to help him get on your back to ride you. He called me a servant too," said Godd.

Well, I got mad now. "I am not a horse! I am a beagle. Nobody rides beagles, especially fat guys! And mah chum Godd here is no servant! Godd is, well, Godd is Godd!"

I was real close to the fat guy's face. He looked at me for a second, then took his pipe from his mouth & rapped me hard on mah nozebone.

"O! help! O! mah nosebone! Listen, ya dum fat guy, I don't like you! I am so mad I might just run away & hide!" I cried.

Godd looked at me with a sly little smile. "Algernon, I think we should humor this old gentleman bear. I will be his Servant & you will be his Steed. I think he needs us to go along with this game."

Well, Godd asked very nicely, & looked like such a cute little guy, that I didn't want to say no.

So Godd helped the fat bear onto mah back. Boy! What a fat guy! I struggled

along slowly with Godd walking next to me. It seemed like the way back was shorter but that might have just been one of Godd's little tricks.

Iceland had moved close enough to Bags End that we didn't need to jump across to it.

I guessed we had to bring this fat guy to Sheila first, so we headed for Sheila's Throne Room.

We found Sheila slouched down in her Throne, crunching a carrot (O! Yuk!), & reading a book.

When she looked up & saw the fat bear on mah poor backbone, & Godd the small pink bear standing next to us, she started laughing real hard. She laughed so hard she fell off her Throne.

The fat bear said something to Godd at this point. "Hemos desagradado su majestad, la reina del conejito. Tenemos que ir de rodillas y suplicarle miseri cordia. ¡Ayúdame fuera esta jamelgo sin valor!"

Godd said before I could ask, "He said we have displeased Her Majesty, Queen Bunny, Servant. We must fall down on our knees & beg her mercy. Help me off this worthless nag!"

Sheila was laughing even harder now. Boy! I wasn't laughing. I runned behind Sheila's Throne where it was safe, & peeked out from behind it. What I saw was Godd & the fat bear sorta bending down funny. Sheila couldn't stop laughing.

Finally, Godd the little pink bear whispered to Sheila, "I think we should go along with this for the moment, Sheila."

Sheila whispered back, in a sort of serious voice, "OK, Godd, if you say so."

Godd stepped back & said, "I humbly present to Her Majesty, Queen Bunny, the Honorable Don Oso Antiquo, a gentleman, & Her Majesty's most gracious & humble servant. My Master says that all which belongs to him, his life, his services, & his property, are at the disposal of Her Majesty, the Queen!"

I could see Sheila was trying hard not to laugh.

Don Oso Antiquo Visits Bags End!

Part II

Sheila slouched down in her Throne & crunched a carrot (O! Yuk!). Then she talked in Spanish.

"Levántate, Señor, no se arrodillen ante mí. Como usted no es un ciudadano de mi país, se me debe respetar pero no la lealtad. Será mi invitado, Don Oso Antiquo, & visita Bags End & su pueblo durante un tiempo. Estaríamos felices de tener a un caballero de su distinción como nuestro más excelso invitado."

Godd motioned me to come out, & stand close, & I did, still with fear, & Godd told me Sheila said to the fat bear, "Arise, sir, do not bow before me. As you are not a citizen of my country, you owe me honor but not allegiance. Be my guest, Don Oso Antiquo, & visit Bags End & its people for a time. We would be happy to have a gentleman of your distinction as our most exalted guest."

When I heard this, I said, "O, Sheila, please tell him I am not a horse, so he won't break mah backbone no more!"

Sheila gave me a grumpy look & said, "You have a choice, beagle. Cooperate & I won't put a saddle on your back & a muzzle in your mouth!"

"What kind of choice is that?" I asked.

"The only kind you get, Steed! Besides, how are you going to get the story of all this for your newspaper, if you're not there to see it?" And with that, Sheila slouched down further in her Throne & went to sleep.

"Yippy-i-o," I said as the fat guy climbed on mah back again.

I struggled slowly along with my heavy burden. The fat guy was asking Godd all sorts of questions about Bags End. I understood Godd's part of the talkings easy cuz Godd can talk both Spanish & English at the same time. Godd is tricky like that. Godd then told me the English of the fat guy's talking.

"¿Cuáles son los principales productos de bolsas final?" ("What are the chief products of Bags End?")

"Bags End doesn't produce anything, except maybe pleasure & amusement for those who read & hear about it."

"¿Cómo apoyar a sus ciudadanos? ¿El estado dar trabajo?" ("How does it support its citizens? Does the state provide work?")

"Well, nobody really works. Most of the people in Bags End are children who play & go to school."

"¡Absolutamente increíble! ¿Pero, cómo es el ejército? ¿Hay impuestos? ¿Reina Sheila utilice el tesoro real para apoyar al Estado?" ("Utterly astounding! But how is the Army supported? Are there taxes? Does Queen Sheila use the Royal Treasury to support the State?")

"There's no money in Bags End. There's no need. Bags End is a fantasyland."

"Ahh, así que este reino posee colonias entonces, cuyos productos & apoyo de ingresos la corona & el estado de la madre." ("Ahh, so this Kingdom possesses colonies then, whose products & revenue support the Crown & the Mother State.")

"No, Your Honor. Bags End has no money, no taxes, no colonies. Bags End is an anarchic, pacifist, neo-Victorian fantasyland."

Don Oso Antiguo sighed sadly. "Ahh, entonces este es un lugar de fantasías infantiles & sueños. Las cosas que me dices me recuerdan a mi propia juventud, hace tanto tiempo. Mi madre, una hermosa mujer noble, fue mi querida acompañante en mis primeros años de vida. He perdido a su toque benévolo del Señor cuando tenía sólo 12. Pensar en ella me hace sentir triste & más rudamente anciano." ("Ahh, this then is a place of childhood fantasies & dreams. The things you tell me remind me of my own youth, so long ago. My mother, a beautiful noblewoman, was my dearest companion in my early life. I lost her to the Lord's benevolent touch when I was but 12. Thinking of her makes me feel sad & most rudely aged.")

Godd the small pink bear looked really interested.

"What was your mother like, Sir?"

"¡Ahh, mi pequeño! Madre fue una diosa a los ojos de mi hijo. ¡Tal gracia! ¡Esa dulce voz! ¡Cantaba canciones a mí de mundos mágicos como sus bolsos final, de los lugares donde la juventud es eterna, donde la alegría está siempre en el aire que respiramos, las frutas que usted come, el sueño que te envuelve bajo las estrellas!" ("Ahh, my little one! Mother was a goddess to my child's eyes. Such grace! Such a sweet voice! She would sing songs to me of magical worlds like your Bags End, of places where youth is eternal, where joy is always in the air you breathe, the fruit you eat, the sleep which engulfs you beneath the stars!")

Don Oso Antiguo's voice was soft & sad.

Then Godd said, "Well, now let us meet new people, gain new memories to cherish."

"Muy bien, siervo. Si tuvieran la amabilidad de ayudarme a volver a este nag, & velocidad de la triste cosa junto, encontraremos la extraña & habitantes de esta tierra maravillosa." ("Very well, Servant. If you would kindly help me back onto this nag, & speed the sorry thing along, we shall encounter the strange & wondrous inhabitants of this land.")

During the next few days, I dragged the fat guy around, meeting different Bags End guys.

Before I tell you all about it, I must say that I got to like Don after awhile. He was kind of grumpy, but he really liked to learn about us different Bags End fellas.

I tried to ask Godd about him & where he came from.

Godd would only smile a small smile & say, "When Bags End became illegal, it opened the door wide for new & strange travelers from the realms of the strange & fantastic."

"I think, though, that this traveler is here to teach us all a few things. Let's listen closely, Algernon."

Don Oso Antiguo Visits Bags End! Grand Finally!

Somehow I always find mahself in strange situations that I don't really understand. The latest pickle I was in (O! Pickles! Yuk!) involved this fat pink bear

named Don Oso Antiguo. Mah funy little friend Godd the small pink bear found him beyond the edge of Bags End, & now we were showing him all over the place. He thought Godd was his servant & me his horse. Let me tell you, that fat guy was heavy on mah poor backbone.

So there we were, slowly going along & Godd was explaining in the fat guy's language, Spanish, all about Bags End. Then he would tell me the English of the fat guy's talkings.

"Bags End is on many levels, one atop the other, connected by ramps. Most levels are hallways with doors on each side, just like an apartment building. At the other end is the edge, beyond which Algernon & I found you," Godd said.

Just then, along came mah silly Bumping bruther Alexander Puppy, & that nice language-knowing guy Allie Leopard.

Alexander, who doesn't know to be suspicious of strangers, went up to the fat guy on mah back & bumped him in a friendly way.

What came next was really weird.

"Alex says, hello, welcome to Bags End. My name is Alexander, & this is my friend Allie Leopard," said Allie.

"All with 1 Bump?" I asked.

"Bump," said Alex.

"Alex says he reminds you that he has told you at length of the beauteous simplicity of Bump Language in its consolidation of what needs to be articulated," said Allie.

"Silly brother," I muttered.

"¿Qué es este extraño y nuevo lenguaje, Bump? No he sido informado de que en la corte Castellana." ("What is this strange new language, Bump? I have not been informed of it in the Castilian court.") said the fat guy.

"Bump is a dum language mah brother made up & it isn't real. He just pretends it is," said me, both grumpy & explaining.

"Now, Algernon, be agreeable," said Godd the small pink bear.

"Bump Language doesn't bring out mah agreeable side," I muttered again.

"Bump is one of the many languages you will hear spoken in Bags End," continued Godd to the fat guy, in his tricky English-Spanish-both way.

"Bump. Bump," said Alex.

"Alex says he believes Bump Language's simplicity & unadorned beauty will eventually win it many converts," said Allie.

"No, he didn't!" I yelled.

The fat guy got off mah back & approached Alex. "Me gustaría saber más acerca de este idioma. Quizás nosotros en España podrían beneficiarse de Bump Idioma." ("I would like to hear more about this language. Perhaps we in Spain could benefit from Bump Language.")

And so the fat guy & Alex walked along with Godd, & Allie translated their conversation.

I decided to slip away for awhile. It seemed like a good time to go see Miss Chris in Connecticut.

Miss Chris was in her TV room on Suzy Couch, sucking her thumb & sitting with Sheila Bunny & Betsy Bunny Pillow & Lisa-Marie Chow.

"Take a walk, beagle, there's no room here," said Sheila.

"Hitch a ride to the other side," whispered Betsy.

"Gwenerals Mwiss Chwis & Bwunny are in high-level military confwence. Pwivate are not allowed," said Sargent Lisa.

I was gonna leave when Miss Chris came & got me. She held me along with Sheila & Lisa, & she got comfortable on Betsy.

"How are you, A-wa-wa?" Miss Chris asked, using the nickname she sometimes has for me.

"I am OK but there is this fat guy who keeps riding me, & that dum Alex was talking Bump stuff, & I was playing with Godd until they took Godd away, & now these guys are real mean," I said with a upset voice.

Miss Chris got me to tell her the whole story. She thought it was very funny.

Just then, the Blondys came in, all 3 of them, & they were floating Alex, Ally, & the fat guy! Godd came in too, floating without a Blondy. He forgot his own law!

Well, it got pretty crowded on Suzy Couch.

Miss Chris took a good look at Don Oso Antiguo.

"Buenos Dios, Don Oso Antiguo," she said politely.

"Ahh, un niño de la cultura & gracia. Que me recuerdan a los hermosos niños de la corte de la corona de Castilla. Excepto, por supuesto, que no son españoles." ("Ahh, a child of culture & grace. You remind me of the beautiful children in the court of the Castilian crown. Except, of course, that you are not Spanish.")

Miss Chris agreed with a smile.

Then everyone got quiet cuz a lot of good TV programs were on, like Fraggle Rock & Bugs Bunny. Godd the small pink bear translated quietly for the fat guy, who found a lot of the programs funny.

"Me gustan estas hospitalidades en esta caja mágica." ("I enjoy these entertainments on this magic box.")

Miss Chris had all us guys around her & in her arms. It was quite a crowd. I noticed that the fat guy's face got kind of happy cuz Miss Chris was holding him, & Godd the little pink bear's smile was even trickier than ever.

After the TV programs were over, Sheila said we should get back to Bags End so Miss Chris could do her homework. Well, Miss Chris didn't like that idea, but Sheila was stubborn.

So we all went back to Bags End where mah adopted mommy Pat gave everyone dinner except your old pal Algernon (O! Yuk!) I just hid in mah room.

Later, Miss Chris came & woked me up.

"Come on, A-wa-wa! Commander Q is interviewing Don Oso Antiguo!" she said, & we went into the Bunny Family's living room to listen to the radio.

Commander Q is this neat radio guy who does a program at night. He was interviewing the fat bear with help from Godd the little pink bear.

"How do you like Bags End?"

"Un lugar encantador de fantasía & sueño. Es realmente divertido & encantadora. Me recuerda mucho de mi propia infancia feliz en la corte Castellana hace muchos años." ("An enchanting place of fantasy & dream. It is truly amusing & delightful. It reminds me greatly of my own happy childhood in the Castilian court many years ago.")

"Some people say Bags End is weird, not a fantasyland of a desirable kind."

"No, Señor, yo apuesto a diferir. Sus idiosincrasias son la esencia misma de su encanto. ¡Imaginar! ¡Una almohada hablando & un juguete lazybug & un pup que habla un 1-palabra idioma! ¡Qué asombro!" ("No, sir, I beg to differ. Its idiosyncrasies are the very stuff of its charm. Imagine! A talking pillow & a lazybug toy & a pup who speaks a 1-word language! What amazement!")

"And how did a gentleman such as yourself come to visit Bags End?"

"Ahh, mi amigo, he viajado mucho & amplia en mis muchos años. Me largo para ver mi casa en Castilla, pero temo & esperamos que el remolcador suave del señor me tira a mi última morada." ("Ahh, my friend, I have traveled far & wide in my many years. I long to see my home in Castile, but I fear & hope that the Lord's gentle tug pulls me to my final resting place.")

"Why did you leave Castile to travel about? A gentleman rarely has the pleasure to leave his land & dependents, & simply set off."

"True. Pero mi tierra, mi casa, no es lo que una vez fue. Castilla se ha convertido en intolerantes a las diferencias entre los individuos. Desde la voz de un caballero de envejecimiento pesa pero ligera como una pluma sobre las decisiones de los jóvenes, me sentí debo vagar hasta que encontré mi paz nuevamente, o hasta que me encontró a mí." ("True. But my land, my home, is not what it once was. Castile has become intolerant of the differences among individuals. Since the voice of an aging gentleman weighs but lightly as a feather upon the decisions of the young, I felt I must wander till I found my peace again, or until it found me.")

Later, Miss Chris brought a lot of us guys to bed with her. There was me, Sheila, Betsy Bunny Pillow, Alex & Allie, Godd the little pink bear, & the fat guy.

When the light was shut off, Miss Chris called out, "Suzy Dark, Suzy Dark, can you come out & play?"

In the darkness, we heard a little girl's voice say, "Hi, Miss Chris!"

"Is Freddy Dark & Baby Dark & Mommy Dark & Buster Dark there?" asked Miss

Chris.

A lot of voices said yes.

"¿Cuáles son las misteriosas voces que claman por la noche?" ("What are the mysterious voices that cry out in the night?") asked the fat guy.

Godd the little pink bear said, "That's the Dark Family. Suzy is the little girl, Baby is the baby, Mommy is the mommy, Freddy is Suzy's big brother, & Buster is the tricky guy."

"¡Qué pregunta aquí que incluso las tinieblas voces & está vivo!" ("What wonders here that even the darkness has voices & is alive!") said the fat guy.

Well, we listened to the Dark Family for awhile. Suzy gave Baby a bottle, & Buster tried to get tricky, & Mommy Dark scolded him.

Finally, all the Dark Family calmed down to sing a dark ditty which Godd the little pink bear translated for the fat guy.

Darkness come & Darkness go
Darkness sad & doncha know
Darkness bright, it's time to go
Darkness like a rapids flow

The darkness tween the stars is swift
Tho it frightens tiny children oft
Tiny ones, turn your pretty fears off
The stars they rest in their darkness loft

Wind will roam among the trees
Hunting wayward Lady Breeze
It's lonely Darkness she loves to tease
His little trembles she seeks to ease.

Darkness come & Darkness go
Darkness glad & doncha know
In Darkness love will come & stay
And like forever river will flow.

"Qué bonita melodía" ("What a lovely tune") said the fat guy. He was sleepy & soon we all were asleep.

The next morning Miss Chris brought all us guys back to Bags End, & she went off to her school.

Godd the little pink bear explained to the fat guy that it was time for everyone to go to Mister Owl's school. The fat guy decided to go along too.

In the morning, Mister Owl was teaching everyone about the letter L. A argument broke out between Betsy Bunny Pillow & that silly Sargent Lisa-Marie Chow about what was the best L word.

"It's lollipop, of course," whispered Betsey, who loves lollipops. O! Yuk!

"No, it isn't. It's lwieutenant," said Lisa.

"You dum baby, what do you know?" whisper yelled Betsy.

"Listen, you dwum insubwordinate pwillow, if you dwon't show pwoper respwect for your supweriors, you will go on weport to Gwneral Shweila!" swaid, I mean said, Lisa.

"Well, my Allies will be most interested in your statements, & they will be considered carefully before further action is taken," said Betsy in a scary kind of way.

"¿Cuáles son estos aliados? ¿La Reina es el Comandante de las fuerzas armadas?" ("What are these Allies? Is the Queen Commander of the armed forces as well?") asked the fat guy.

Godd the little pink bear, who was busy doodling pictures in a little pink notebook, said, "Well, it's kind of hard to explain."

"¿Es como jugar, es que no, todo esto? ¡Qué maravilloso lugar!" ("It's like playing, is it not, all of this? What a wondrous place!") said the fat guy.

Later, at recess, I heard Godd the little pink bear talking to Mister Owl.

"I would like you to give the children the rest of the day off. My friend & I must depart, & I think he would like it if all of you were there to say goodbye," said Godd. Godd didn't have a small smile which was unusual for Godd.

"Where are you going?" asked Oliver.

Godd smiled sadly. "Well, I have to get back to Heaven, & my friend's time for returning there is at hand as well."

I didn't hear Mister Owl's voice cuz I got real upset.

I found the fat guy surrounded by a bunch of fellas & he was blowing all sorts of wonderful shaped bubbles. I didn't stop though. I kind of scrunched under him to get him on mah back & I yelled, "Come on, Allie, we have to save the fat guy!"

I heard Sheila & Betsy voices call me crazy as me & Allie (& the fat guy of course) ran off. I didn't stop running till I was in mah room with the door closed. Then I noticed that mah silly Bumping brother Alex was with us too.

"Bump?" he said.

"Alex says that he is both surprised & pleased by your show of spontaneity. He further remarks that perhaps you aren't such an old fuddy-duddy after all," said Allie.

"¿Cuál es el significado de esto? ¿Tiene mi nag enloquecida?" ("What is the meaning of this? Has my nag gone mad?") demanded the fat guy. Lucky Allie was with us to translate.

So I told him, with Allie's help. "You're gonna die, fella. I heard Godd say so. You're gonna go to Heaven & not come back no more! When I go, it's just like a visit, but you will never return!" I was very upset.

The fat guy looked at me & smiled a very nice smile. Then through Allie he said, "I know where I'm going. It's where I have been headed. Last night I realized I would never see Castile again. It was in a dream. I was playing with my beautiful mother & she was saying I would soon see her again.

"But, Momma, I am here & so are you! I can see you now!" I cried.

"She just smiled at me & held me close, her smile held me close, her smile above all held me sweet, gentle, & close, & I realized I would see her very soon."

I looked at the fat guy, & I guess I kind of gave up, which is not mah usual way. I mean, he wanted to go. I don't though. I like to play in Heaven once in awhile, but I would rather live in Bags End.

"That's my view in reverse, Algernon," said Godd the little pink bear, who'd found me.

"Are you leaving too, Godd?" I asked.

Godd smiled at me, not too sadly though. "I have to bring my friend here to Heaven & show him around a bit."

Soon, most of Bags End was assembled in the hallway which ended in view of Iceland.

I asked Sheila for permission to ride the fat guy back to the place I found him.

"Sure, kid, knock yourself out," said Sheila, crunching a carrot (O! Yuk!), & trying to keep her crown on.

So me & Godd & the fat guy walked onto Iceland. We even passed the ice cat we saw the first time.

"Did you discover our place's secret?" the ice cat asked me.

I shook mah head. "Not really," I said.

"Iceland floats on the power of melancholy & dream," said the ice cat. "In this case, that of Don Oso Antiguo."

I nodded politely but didn't say nothing. I think philosophy is like an onion, it should be used in little bits & not all the time. What am I saying? O! Onion! Yuk!

The fat guy got off mah back & found his bubble pipe. He sat with Godd the little pink bear blowing bubbles like happiness.

"Well, seeya, fella," I said.

That fat guy said something in a nice voice.

Godd said, "Don Oso Antiguo says you are a fine steed after all, especially considering you are a beagle."

I laughed. Godd laughed. The fat guy laughed. Then I left. And they left too.

I returned to Bags End & kept to mahself till Miss Chris invited me to hear a

Ramie bedtime story on their house's front steps beneath the stars.

Miss Chris, Sheila, Betsy, Alex, Allie, & lots of other guys sat looking at the stars.

I felt sad as I sat there. I had liked the fat guy. I was sad he was gone. I even kind of missed mah backache.

Miss Chris picked me up & hugged me closest of all.

"I don't understand it, person mommy," I said to Miss Chris in mah sad beagle voice.

I kind of cried & then I fell asleep. When I woke up, it was a baby day just up to crawl around. I got up to see what would come.

Sheila Bunny's & Miss Chris's
Greatest Voyage of All!
Part I

The time again is now for yet another trip to explore parts unknown of Bags End. Every time Sheila leads one of these trips, we always end up in strange places & I never understand half of what happens.

Still, the rigorous ethics of beagleboy journalism makes me have to go to write the story.

So Sheila had announced that we would hear all about the latest trip in the Bags End Auditorium. It seemed like all the Bags End Friends to the last were there.

I sat in the front row next to mah silly Bumping brother Alex & that nice language-knowing guy Allie Leopard.

"Bump. Bump?" said mah silly brother.

I waited for Allie to translate for me like he usually does, but he didn't. His leopard's mouth was moving but no words were coming out.

"Hey! This isn't some new silly language, like Soundless English or something?" I asked suspiciously.

"No, Algernon, I think Ally has lost his voice," said someone nearby. It was mah smart friend & writer downer of Bags End News, Lori Bunny.

"O no!" I cried. "Untranslated Bump Language!"

"Bump? Bump?" asked Alex. He looked concerned for me like I was hurt.

Well, Lori was laughing real hard. She is a orange bunny with a real smart look on her face. Sometimes Sheila, who is her younger sister, calls her Brains.

Allie had a pencil & a little pad. He scribbled a note & handed it to me. I looked at it real hard but the words weren't telling their meaning.

Lori leaned over from her seat & looked at the note with me. "Allie says that Alex says he wants to know if we will be searching for linguistic or philological antecedents for modern day Bump Language. He feels the Ancients may have spoken a less well-defined & articulate version of Bump. He also was worried that you have finally succumbed to the dreaded English virus, well-documented to afflict long-term & hardcore users of English."

I held mah headbone in mah paws & groaned. "I think Bump will batter me before English erases me."

Just then, we heard a noise from the stage & everyone got quiet waiting for Sheila to come hopping out.

Instead, out came members of Sheila's Kool Jazz Band. I recognized Miss Chris playing her piano, Polly El playing saxophone, & Denny Puppy playing drums.

They played a real neat jazzy song & then Miss Chris began to sing:

Here comes the King!
Here comes the King!
Ain't no goody 2 shoe thing
Ain't no fake diamond ring
Ain't no half-cocked ding-a-ring-ling
Here comes the King!

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King: Sheila Bunny

Written Down By: Lori Bunny

Shlela Bunnys' an Mees Chreeses' Gratist Voyig of Awt! (Part I.)

The tim agen iz now for yet anothr trip too eksplor parts unown of Bagzend. Evry tim Shlela leeds won of theez trips we allwez end up in strang plasis an I nevr undrstand haff of wat hapens...

Stil, the rigerus ethiks of beegel boy jernelizm mak me hav too go too rit the storee.

So Shlela had anownsed that we wood heer awl about the latist trip 1 morning in the Bagzend Awditoreum. It seemd lik awl the Bagzend frends too the last wer theer.

The King of Kool
 She ain't no fool
 She's the rarest jewel
 So hip it's cruel

The jazzy little monarch
 with purple eyes so stark
 they might cause some spark
 just for a dim lark

Here comes the King!
 Here comes the King!
 Here comes the King!

Well, most of the Bags End guys in the audience clapped real loud. A few booed but shut up when Sheila came roaring onto the stage on her BunnyCycle Beatrix. She looked over the crowd & then talked.

"After the visit by Don Oso Antiguio, I have decided that it is time to go beyond Bags End!"

Miss Chris on piano played some little laughing notes. Tiddle Tiddle Tiddle-eee.

"Not top nor bottom this time. Somewhere"--Sheila paused & looked up at the ceiling--"else," she finished.

Denny hit his drums. Ka chunk, pow!

"Since nobody really knows much about what is beyond the edge of Bags End, I think I will go there," Sheila finished. The band played lots of jazz & everyone cheered.

Then someone yelled, "Hey, Sheila, who is going with ya?"

"Quiet, beagle! I was coming to that," Sheila grouched.

"O rats," I muttered.

"My plan is to float a group of explorers over the edge of Bags End 3 at a time using the Blondys. When the first group reaches somewhere safe, the Blondys will go back for the rest, 3 at a time. The first 3 explorers will be myself, Miss Chris, & Algernon Beagle, Official Expedition Scribe."

"Hey, some of those words are me!" I yelled all happy.

Some weren't happy though.

"How come that dum beagle gets to go first?" demanded Betsy Bunny Pillow in her whispery voice. "My Allies should be primarily informed of new places!"

"Thwat dwum bweagle should bwee in the weer of the wanks for his mwany instwances of inswubordination!" yelled that silly baby, Sargent Lisa-Marie Chow.

Well, it looked like your old pal Algernon was gonna get wacked by mah many enemies when a group of Blondys floated over to me & then floated me onto the stage next to Sheila. I was just about to tell them that beagles don't float good when a thought told me that if they knew I wouldn't get to go, so I got quiet.

I stood next to Sheila & her BunnyCycle. She looked me over. "I understand your protests, but unless someone else wants to write down the adventures, the stupid beagle here is it."

"Yah!" I yelled, "The stupid beagle here is--hey! You hurt mah feelings bone!"

Well, Sheila was gonna say something meaner when Miss Chris came over & hugged me. That quieted mah legion of detractors.

"We will leave tomorrow morning, so sleep tight & show up where & when told!" Sheila said finally & then I guess she was done cuz Miss Chris hopped on the back of the BunnyCycle & they roared off her stage & up one of the aisles to the back of the Bags End Auditorium, & they were gone.

Well, I got a few dirty not to mention threatening looks that afternoon from people jealous of me going on the trip first with Sheila & Miss Chris.

I kept to mahself until that night when I got to be a guest on Commander Q's Nightly Radio Program. He sent me a note asking to interview me. As a fellow member of the press, I of course said yes.

You never get to see him even when you are in his radio station, cuz you're in

one room alone & you hear his voice out of a box.

"My special guest tonight is Algernon Beagle, editor of Bags End News. Algernon has been picked by Sheila Bunny & Miss Chris to help lead their Greatest Voyage of All. Algernon, why do you think they picked you?"

"Well, Miss Chris did cuz she likes me, & Sheila did cuz her ego likes the idea of having someone write down her adventures."

"How does this compare to other journeys through Bags End?" asked Commander Q.

"It doesn't yet cuz it hasn't yet. But I bet it will probably be weird & hard to figger out like the others were," I said.

The rest of the night was pretty quiet. I don't remember mah dreams though they were probably better than awhile ago.

I got up early the next day & when I stepped out of mah bedroom into the Bunny Family's TV room I saw a light far away. I went out into the hallway & the light was still far away. I heard faint music too so I went in the direction of the music & the light.

I had to follow it down several levels, but I couldn't quite catch the light or really hear clearly the sound.

So I kept following along, figgering this was probably Sheila's tricky way of getting me to the right place.

And it worked cuz all of a sudden I was on a level where there were crowds of Bags End guys. At the other end of the hallway I heard a Baby Blondy voice yell, "Yay, beagle!" & Simmi Bittersweet floated over to me. She took mah pawbone & floated me over the crowd down to the edge of the hallway.

There was Sheila Bunny & Miss Chris waiting for me with the other 2 Blondy girls.

"You're late, Scribe," growled Sheila. She wore a kool jazzy looking hat.

"Hi, A-wa-wa!" said Miss Chris, & she gived me a hug. I like her best.

Sheila told Tammy the oldest Blondy to float her beyond the edge.

"Citizens of Bags End, once again your leader & King & Emperor is going to set out to discover parts of Bags End unknown. Miss Chris & I have discussed longly what we may encounter beyond the edge, & we agree that we are eager to find out.

"The Blondys will be back when we have found a safe resting place to go back & bring 3 more hardy adventurers. In order to keep everyone from fighting, I won't tell you who's next. You will have to wait to find out. Well, goodbye," & with that Tammy swooped Sheila down & out of sight. Sammy the middle Blondy floated Miss Chris, & Simmi floated your scared old pal Algernon behind Sheila. We heard cheering & a few grumpy protests, but soon the hallway we had been on, sight & sound of it, was gone.

Floating with a Blondy is not like being in a airplane or on the back of a bird or anything like that. The reason why is cuz you don't feel the wind rushing around you or nothing. Everything is still. It's almost like being in a photograph except you can move around a little if you want to.

We floated for a long time in almost all dark. I hoped maybe Suzy Dark or her family were around, but when I called out for them, they didn't answer.

Simmi Bittersweet is a nice Baby Blondy, but when the dark got harder, her hands gripped may pawbones real tighter. It was kind of like the dark would let her float on, but wanted me for a prize. The dark felt like a heavy blanket, or an ocean pulling me under. It was so quiet though. I was scared but I kept holding onto Simmi with mah eyes tightly closed for a real long time.

"Naptime is over, Official Scribe. On your paws!" said a Sheila-like voice suddenly.

Then I felt Miss Chris's arms hug me & I wondered at mah luck.

I opened mah eyes & there was Sheila, Miss Chris, & the Blondys standing around me. I blinked a couple of times to make sure no dreams were in mah eyes.

Then I looked around me, but I could see nothing but white. It was quite a change after all that dark.

Sheila talked again. "'The Blondys are going back for some more Bags End Friends. Since this place doesn't look like much, we will wait here." And so off floated the Blondys into the white.

Miss Chris had sat down cross-legged & was holding Sheila in her lap &

skritchng Sheila's forehead. I sat next to Miss Chris trying not to be jealous. She saw me & said, "A-wa-wa, my feet are cold. They sure could use some nice Ear Blankets."

So I sat between Miss Chris's feet & used mah long ears to cover her feet.

"Speaking of blankets, Person Mommy, when we were being floated by the Blondys, I felt almost like the dark was a blanket that wouldn't let me go," I said.

"I didn't feel that at all," said Miss Chris.

"Me neither," said Sheila.

Now that was really strange.

I think after awhile we fell asleep. We must have because I had a scary dream.

The light became all blotchy on the floor & in the sky. Loud pounding sounds hurt my earbones. It was real ugly. Like ugliness was after me. Like mah insides, the nice Algernon parts, were being chased. The blotches in the sky did a kind of weird dance & the pounding got louder & the floor got zig-zaggy, & I wanted to call Miss Chris & Sheila to help me, but I was afraid the ugly would get in mah mouth. But I kept getting pushed until the dream snapped, if it was a dream, & I could see only white & someone in mah face.

"Bump?" said mah suddenly-here silly brother Alexander, & he bumped mah nosebone too.

"Back off, chum," I growled. Then I realized something was wrong. Usually Allie Leopard tells me the English of Alex's Bump words. But Allie wasn't around. Instead . . .

"My Allies do not approve of Bump Language!" whisper yelled Betsy Bunny Pillow, looking all big & fluffy & scary.

"Thwat dwogfwace should bwe reorientated in thwe official military language of Bwags End," said Sargent Lisa-Marie Chow.

"Bump Bump?" asked Alex again. Miss Chris came over & gave him a Bump hug, which is hard to tell about. She likes him for some reason.

The Blondys came floating up to Miss Chris & Sheila & there we all were, 9 Bags End Friends, 7 waiting for Miss Chris & Sheila to say what next.

Sheila & Miss Chris looked at each other. Then they left us & went away to talk.

Alex tried to Bump me again, but I hid amongst the Blondys.

Lisa Marie-Chow got sleepy & mumbled something about twoops bweing at wease. Then she fell asleep. Betsy kept her own company, which is fine with me.

Finally, Sheila & Miss Chris came back & everyone wondered what they would say.

"Miss Chris & I have decided that this company isn't big enough, but we won't get anywhere fast going 3 people at a time from place to place," said Sheila.

"So we are going to travel by Blondy Trayn!" said Miss Chris all happily.

Everyone who'd been listening started talking at once, but nobody said anything useful. Miss Chris & Sheila were quiet waiting for everyone else to be too.

"Now the Blondy Trayn is a rather a rather strange way to go, so you're going to have to listen while I explain it," Sheila said.

What she told us, dear readers, was truly amazing.

Sheila Bunny's & Miss Chris's
Greatest Voyage of All!
Part II

"When you take the Blondy Trayne, it means you float along though the air just like the Blondys do."

"But we can't! We know the Law of Grabitee!" I said.

"Yes, but you forget it while you're floating," said Miss Chris.

Well, this plan sounded kind of scary & all, but I guessed since it was made up by Miss Chris, Sheila, and the Blondys that it would be OK.

"How are we gonna forgot the Law of Grabitee?" I asked.

"That part of the plan comes when the Blondys get back with the last 3 members of our group," said Sheila. She had a really weird look on her face, & I thought her

purple eyes were brighter than usual.

So the Blondys floated away again. Betsy Bunny Pillow & Sargent Lisa fell asleep right away, which was fine by me. I sat near Miss Chris who was hold Sheila & Alexander. Miss Chris was even speaking Bump Language with that silly brother. I got a little jealous.

"Hey, Person Mommy, wouldn't you rather hold a little guy who speaks English, & not some dum imaginary language?" I asked.

"Bump! Bump!" said Alex.

"He said 1 day English will be just a distant memory of a less articulate time," said Miss Chris, & she laughed a lot.

"No way, Joe," I said in a grumpy voice. I was gonna find mah own place to wait when Miss Chris picked me up & helded me too. She understands beagles.

I guess I must have real sleepy because all of a sudden I was doing a dream.

In it, I was on a spaceship, the Victoriana. I was a bad guy on a space TV show, & I was battling the Star Trek Enterprise.

"Hey! This is fun! I like being the bad guy!" I said. "Mister Pillow, fire a round of insults at them!"

"Yes, sir," said a polite & obedient dream Betsy.

"Sir, the enemy is firing a volley of diced vegetables at us!" said dream Sheila at her post.

I leaped up in mah captain's chair & yelled, "O! Yuk! Mister Bunny, hit the Missed Button!"

"Yes, sir," said dream Sheila. The yucky food missed us by a mile.

"Sir, now they're firing a round of dark chocolate confections!" said Betsy in her whispery dream voice.

"O! Yuk! Hit the Missed Button again!" I yelled.

"It won't work. It's stuck, sir!" said dream Sheila.

"O! Help! O! Abandon ship! We surrender! I don't like war anyway!" I yelled when the dream suddenly ended.

I felt a large guy's nose bumping me & heard strange words. Opening mah eyes, I saw my brother standing over me.

"Bump?" said Alex in his friendly but incomprehensible way.

"O, fooley," I said. "I think I would almost rather battle food. O! Yuk!"

Allie Leopard came up to me & handed me a note. I looked real hard at the letters, so hard mah poor brainbone started hurting.

Then Lori Bunny came up & read the note for me. "Allie says that Alex says he was concerned about you. Specifically, he wonders if you still dream in English?"

Well, I struggled to mah short feet & looked up at Alex & said, "I dream in English, fella, sure! English nouns & verbs & adjectives." Here mah voice got low & tricky. "Sometimes I even dream in English dangling participles, whatever those are."

Alex was gonna say some more Bump stuff when I heard an authoritative Sheila voice say, "Blondy Trayning! First threat!"

"I thought it was called the Blondy Trayn," said me.

We had all gathered in a group. Miss Chris gave mah nosebone a little pat & said, "First Trayning, then Trayn, A-wa-wa!"

So there we all were: the 3 Blondys, Miss Chris, Sheila, me, Alex, Ally, Lori, Betsy, Lisa-Marie, & 1 other guy, Ramie the Toy Tall Boy! I like him.

"Hi, Ramie!" I said.

Ramie was holding Miss Chris's hand & trying to keep awake. "The Lazybug Express is much easier," he mumbled. Miss Chris gave him a I-don't-like-Lazybugs look. Boy! I'm sure glad I don't Lazybug much!

"Now," said Sheila. "I want you to look at my purple eyes closely, all of you."

So we did. Sheila's eyes got brighter & purpler than ever. I think I heard the Blondys singing a pretty song in Blondy language. Anyway, soon I felt mah beagle body leave the ground & start to float!

"Hey!" I yelled. "This defies the Law of, of, some law or other, doesn't it?"

Everyone else was confused too. But the Blondys & Sheila herded us into a long line. We were all pretty quiet. Floating through the white can be kind of scary but very serious.

I liked it though. I knew we would be OK cuz Sheila, Miss Chris, & the Blondys

were leading us. I wondered where we would go next.

Floating is real sweet & nice & polite, once you get used to it. I didn't feel like talking or arguing or nothing. Just quiet & sweet. I recommend it to all my loyal readers.

Sheila Bunny's & Miss Chris's
Greatest Voyage of All!
Grand Finally!

Every time that little bunny Sheila gets restless paws, & leads a bunch of us Bags End guys on a journey somewhere, I know it will be mostly strange, a little nice, & hard to understand too.

I think if I was leader of Bags End, I would hardly go anywhere cuz mah exploration jeans are recessive. Maybe I would take volunteers instead to go to strange places for the honor of beagle & homeland.

None of that matters, though. I am most certainly not in charge of Bags End.

Anyway, we left that place of white behind, & floated in our long Trayn line into a place without no color at all. Sometimes you ask someone what he sees & he says, "I see nothing," but that isn't what he really means. I mean, I saw nothing &, let me tell you, it's even less than people think.

Try seeing with your paws or hands. Nothing, right? Right. That's what I mean.

The last thing I remember for awhile was just a little bit of a Blondy Song. I only remember a few words:

Breeeez
Hummm
Sawftley
Mermermermer
Beyond the sun
Fading like the moon
Tooo soon tooo soon
Again
Tooo soon tooo soon
Again
Tooo soon tooo soon
Again love
Tooo soon.

Then I felt mah body disappear. This is such a weird feeling I have felt before. All of a sudden I was just a good idea floating quietly in the nothing. It was very peaceful.

All of a sudden I was back, but I wasn't floating no more. All the other Bags End guys weren't around. Strange, too, cuz I found I was in a hallway of Bags End, not over the edge no more.

I felt so strange I forgot to be scared. I just walked along waiting for something to happen.

I went up a couple of ramps to a level where I suddenly found mahself in Miss Chris's TV room. There were all mah friends! Miss Chris was on Suzy Couch, sucking her thumb & resting on Betsy Bunny Pillow. She was holding Sheila & Alex. Lisa-Marie & Allie & Lori were gathered around her. Ramie was on nearby Freddy Couch sleeping behind his tricky I-am-awake sunglasses. The Blondys were floating in the air above Suzy Couch. They were all watching some real good cartoons.

"A-wa-wa!" Miss Chris said all happy. There were a number of groans & a few quiet threats from mah several detractors in the bunch.

Still, Miss Chris helded out her arms to me so I went to them. She helded me in the same arm with mah silly Bumping brother Alex. He bumped me, "Hi! How are you?" I bumped him back that I was fine but felt a little strange.

"Bump?" he said, all concerned.

"Bump. Bump," I said back.

"Bump. Bump," he said & then watched more TV.

"Bump, Bump-Bump, Bump," I said.

Allie Leopard said, "I thought you didn't like Bump Language!" He was all surprised for some reason.

"Yah, beagle, it was your one endearing quality," whispered Betsy.

"Bump!" yelled Alex, all upset.

"Yah, ya dum guys, Bump!" I said. "And Bump-Bump too!"

Now everyone was talking at once. It got all weird cuz pretty soon it seemed like everyone was talking Bump. Then it all got dark & there I was in some strange place with mah brother Alex over me.

Miss Chris picked me up & holded me. "You were bumping in your dream, A-wa-wa," She gaved me a nice hug.

"Bump!" said Alex, all happy.

I jumped down from Miss Chris's arms & looked Alex straight in his neck, & said, "I don't do Bump, fella."

"Bump!" & now he was all sad, & he sat down to suck his toe. He knows all the tricks cuz now Miss Chris felt all bad for him & picked him up. He talked Bump with her. Dum brother.

I looked around me for the first time. It was almost dark so it was kind of hard to see.

I could see the shadowy shapes of the other Bags End guys nearby, but they were all laying down like they were asleep. Then I looked up & saw 3 shadowy Blondys floating above.

"Miss Chris, how come we were all asleep?" I asked when Alex was finally quiet for a second.

Miss Chris put me on her lap too so she could see mah face. "I don't know. I woke up just before you, & I found Alex sitting next to me, & the Blondys floating."

"Hey!" I said. "We're not floating no more! We must know the Law of Grabitee again."

"The last thing I remember was floating with the Blondy Trayn, & then it kind of faded into a strange dream. I was a character in a book & I didn't have free will because I was trapped in words & pictures. I hated it," Miss Chris made a face. I told her about mah dream & she thought it was very strange too.

Then Alex, who likes to butt in where he is not invited, said a lot of Bump words. Miss Chris said Alex had a dream that he was at Bags End School & Mister Owl was testing him on a language he didn't know at all.

Slowly, the other guys woke up too. Each had something to say. Lisa said she dreamed she was watching an episode of a TV program called "The New M×A×S×H" & there weren't no Hawkeye in it. She thinks Hawkeye is her daddy. Silly sargent.

Lori, who is Sheila's real smart guy sister, said, "I dreamed I was in a classroom with all these strange people who didn't know the answers to any questions & sang, 'We don't know! We don't care! Our brains are small, & full of air!'"

Ramie just mumbled, "I dreamed I was awake. It was terrible."

Betsy Bunny Pillow said she dreamed about being a fruit growing on a tree. And Allie said, in a note that Lori read to us, "I dreamed everyone spoke the same language."

Nobody really liked their dreams or understood how they came about. I mean, floating was just the opposite of bad dreams.

We had kind of got into a circle while talking, with the Blondys floating above. I didn't notice Sheila was missing until she hopped into the center of the circle, & everyone got quiet.

"I think first-time floating & being over the edge made the bad dreams," she said quietly.

Miss Chris got up & went over to Sheila. "What was your dream?"

"I dreamed I was a wild bunny again," she said quietly.

"What now?" I asked.

Sheila closed 1 purple eye & looked up at the sky. She looked almost like she does when she is slouched down in her Throne, thinking hard. Everyone was real quiet,

waiting for what next.

"I don't think we belong here. Or maybe we're not ready to be over the edge. We have to go back."

Everyone was kind of sad cuz this isn't how these trips usually go. Even the Blondys floated down to the ground.

"Are you sure, Sheila?" said Miss Chris with a real serious face.

Sheila nodded.

Now the question was how to get back.

Nobody really wanted to do the Blondy Trayn again cuz of its side effects.

"I thwink a gwood mwarch might be in order," said that silly baby, Sargent Lisa-Marie Chow.

"I DO NOT MARCH!" whisper yelled Betsy in capital letters. "You certifiably questionable infant!"

"BUMP. Bump," said mah brother Alex.

I looked at Allie Leopard, who scribbled a note. Lori Bunny read it to me.

"Allie says that Alex says there are certain experimental mystical Bump modes of transport we could try."

"Mystical Bump?" I yelled. "Ways to Bump travel?" I groaned. "I think your brain has gone over the edge too, ya crazy relative!"

Alex got this real tricky look on his face & said, "Bump, Bump, Bump, da-Bump."

"Da-Bump?" I yelled. "Da-Bump! I thought it was a 1 word language! You cheated! Fake language penalty!"

Lori told me that Allie's scribbled note said that maybe the English virus I had was setting in hard. I rolled mah eyes at all.

Pretty soon everyone was yelling & not getting along, just like we always do. Cooperation was never a Bags End strength.

Finally, a Sheila-like voice said, "QUIET!" & we did.

"Look," she said, pointing to a Miss Chris shadow. She was crying. I guess everyone felt real bad cuz Miss Chris is no weepy unless things go really bad.

"Some greatest adventure of all," somebody muttered.

"Buton it, beagle!" Sheila growled.

"O rats!" said me.

The place we were in was now completely dark. The only light was the small glow given off by the Blondys 3 & Sheila's purple eyes.

Everything was quiet for a moment. Then, instead of going back, Sheila hopped on, & everyone else followed.

We walked & bounced & hopped a really long time in the darkness. I felt like the ground below mah paws was sandy.

It kind of got weird next cuz this place ended & there wasn't ground no more, but it wasn't like we were floating again or like when our bodies disappeared.

There were lights all around, above & below too. And there was pretty music. I realized that it was that kool guy Pete Tchaikovsky & his "Nutcracker" songs. I felt kind of like I was spinning, & I saw mah different friends as I did.

The other Bags End guys looked different & sweeter. Let me tell you.

Miss Chris's face was real vague & pretty & her hair was long & floated around her like a robe.

Sheila looked even smaller than usual, faster, smarter, like she was the best Sheila in the world, even though she is already.

Lisa-Marie Chow looked older & kind of sleepy, like being had easy rules, & now she knew them all.

Betsy Bunny Pillow was deeper blue in her dress, & she looked like whatever she really wanted in her pillow heart was there, or not important anymore.

Ramie had his eyes wide open, & he was smiling wide as sky. Wowsmile. Dear me.

When I spun in view of Lori Bunny, it was like her orange fur was the sunshine. Her fur shined real smart, real smart fur.

I saw Allie Leopard next. He is kind of a grey furred cat with black spots, & he has bright green eyes. I heard Allie singing & it blended with the "Nutcracker" music. It was a song in a kind of Dream Gibberish, but I had never had it before awake.

Last I saw Alex mah crazed relative & he smiled at me & I think he hugged me with no bumping involved.

Your old pal Algernon was worn out with everyone else, so I closed mah eyes & felt the music like a bath. The music tickled mah fur like water.

I think this was like the Season of Lights holiday over the edge in Bags End. It was as though we had forgotten the holiday & it had looked for us & found us.

I don't know how long we existed inside the Season of Lights. The last thing I remember was opening mah eyes & finding me & all the other Bags End Friends on the branches of this giant tree that was growing out of nowhere & getting gianter & gianter. We were so little, like ornaments on its branches & there were colored balls too, & shiny wreaths & dangling toys & lots & lots of other nice decorations, & we were going up, up, so up all the time like a fast ride. It was really great!

I looked up & saw the sun & clouds & wind & darkness we were heading for very fast. Up & up till I closed mah eyes & was very quiet.

"Bump? Bump! Bump?" I suddenly heard in mah ears.

I opened mah eyes & there I was back in regular Bags End, near the edge of the same level, where the journey had started.

Allie Leopard & all the other journey guys were nearby & the hallway was crowded, just like it had been when we left.

Allie handed me a note which Lori read to me.

"Allie said that Alex asks are you alright? Does the English virus have you in its grip? Shall I administer the appropriate Bump chant?"

Before I could say anything, someone from the crowd said, "How come you're back so quickly, Sheila?"

I saw Sheila standing next to Miss Chris. Sheila just said, "Life over the edge is fast & hard. Well, goodbye." Then she hopped through the crowd without another word. Miss Chris followed her, & then Betsy, & Lisa-Marie, & the other journey guys.

Since nobody else was talking, it was up to me to tell the story, which I have. Greatest Voyage of All? I don't know. Strangest? Good chance.

As usual, I still don't really know what happened. It seemed reality & mah dreams ganged up on me to be confusing.

I went to see Sheila in her Throne Room a few days after the trip. She was slouched down in her Throne with a uneaten carrot in her paws. O! Yuk!

She saw me but said nothing. I sat near her Throne in ma comfortable spot, & rested.

Usually we talk about these trips, so that I can try to understand them better.

We didn't talk this time, though. We just sat near each other. I think Sheila liked me being nearby even tho she said nothing.

After awhile, I fell asleep. But this is strange. In mah dream, I was awake & sitting near Sheila, who was in her Throne. She was singing a hum with no words. It was very pretty.

I woke up & it was quiet. Sheila was asleep. But that was OK too.

The end.



* * * * *



Extrasensory Overload

[Travel Journal]

There was a ceremony last night to try to heal a little girl from Siecoya, the village downriver. Maribel told me Yerbi had been born with brain damage and only one lung, and now she had leukemia, a respiratory infection, and parasites. Her grandparents brought her here in a canoe, her grandfather being Joaquín's cousin Mariano. Maribel placed her hands on the child, calming and soothing her during moments when she cried in her fever and it hurt her to be touched by anyone else. Joaquín told me he was going to give her an infusion of an herb called *chirihuayusa* to bring down her fever.

The grandmother held Yerbi on her lap. Joaquín chanted over the infusion. Then her grandparents tried to get her to drink it. They cajoled, she wept—they forced her to take a sip, she cried out and knocked it away—they backed off a little, she moaned and writhed—and it began again. I touched her forehead with the backs of my fingers to see how hot she was and she flinched away from my touch. Only Maribel could touch her painlessly. Whenever her grandmother even shifted position, Yerbi was in agony.

Finally, she dropped off to sleep. Maribel departed. Joaquín prayed and poured yagé for himself and for me, then worked with a leaf fan to cleanse the sleeping child's aura and whisk energy into her. With the soft ache of yagé in my belly, I lay back in my hammock and dozed off.

Eunmi, who was my girlfriend during the summer I canvassed for Greenpeace in Los Angeles, is facing me. She's radiant. We nurture and nourish each other. The last time we spoke on the phone, four years ago, she said she'd keep in touch, and she's kept her word in the most amazing way.

Then there's a shift, then a twist—and I snap awake and sit up in the hammock, exclaiming into the swirling dimness, "She was here!"

Joaquín is singing. Mariano and his wife whisper to each other.

I summon Eunmi's image. It has changed from an overwhelming presence to a fragile memory. I replay the dream to fix it in my mind. I feel the yagé gathering force within me. I lie back down, feel the ache in my belly, see the patterns in my teacher's song. Soon, the yagé blooms like a fire-flower, like a supernova. Gasping and screaming, I burn up.

When I come down from it a little, I try to put what I witnessed into dull human words:

*I saw the Tao,
the essence behind reality.*

*It loves us infinitely.
It suffers with us because it is us.
Our suffering is extreme, necessary, and temporary.*

*I've become enlightened.
Truth will glow through me.
Many people will be healed.
I've become a prophet.
I've become the messiah.*

*All cosmologies are true.
They operate at different levels.
The atheists are right: there's no God.
The monotheists are right: there's one God.
The polytheists are right: there are myriad gods.
The system is big enough to contain all these and more.*

I step outside and piss in a bush. That one cup of water in the afternoon was too much for me to last the whole night. Afterwards, letting the hem of my tunic fall, I gaze up at the swaying stars as I did through peyotified eyes in Mexico, as I did through bemushroomed eyes a different night in Olympic National Park near Seattle in 1987. This time I'm highest of all. I could just about communicate with those stars. Must remain silent and—

¡Toanké!” calls Joaquín. *“¡Regresando hamaca!”* Return to your hammock.

“Un momento,” I brush him off, fixing my eyes on the wise gleams above me. That's the signal. From under the hut, the dogs Cuauquillo and Potente raise the alarm. They bark at me like mad until, feeling like the biggest fool in the forest, I clamber back up on the hut and sink back into my hammock.

“No andando noche,” Joaquín reminds me quietly. No walking around nighttime. I murmur assent. Fucking dogs. They're pretty smart. I'd thought that since we are friends, they wouldn't bark at me. But they're truly Joaquín's dogs. His huntsmen. His vassals. His hit-dogs. The sons of bitches. I love 'em.

Later, inspired by different energies and a fresh cup of yagé, I stand up next to my hammock, not walking around, and dance very, very slowly, a Butoh dancer, my body changing into thousands of sculptures. The Norse runes come tumbling like fiery sparks up from the ground into the soles of my feet, up through my body, out through my curled fingers and tongue.

Reclining again. I pick up my little blue nylon bag of magic objects. I take out a wooden button, two inches across, with a cord attached to it. It was a gift from a family friend. Because of the cord, she called it the belly button. I place it on my belly. I'm wearing the green tunic that Maribel sewed for me and the button rests lightly on the nylon fabric right over my

navel.

The wizard night strides into the future with his qualities and amplitudes of magic and intoxication, until the sky gets light, and he shrinks and vanishes, promising to return in twelve hours.

Across the river, an oropendola sang. Maribel's chickens foraged outside the hut. Yerbi slept in her sleeping grandmother's arms in a hammock. Mariano murmured with Joaquín, then went outside.

I sat up and found I couldn't find the button. I shook out the blanket I'd wrapped myself in. I scanned the floor. I went under the floor—maybe it had slipped between a crack in the floorboards and been carried off by a chicken. I checked along the path to the outhouse—maybe it had snagged on the completely smooth fabric of my tunic and then dropped off. The belly button was nowhere to be found.

I returned to my hammock and lay down. Yerbi was awake in her grandmother's lap, a rumble in her throat, her half-open eyes gazing into the distance. Joaquín was wrapped in a blanket, asleep, in another hammock. Mariano took 10,000 sucres from me and paddled off in his canoe toward the store across the river. Maribel and her daughter-in-law Katia came over from the other house with Katia's son Mecías and stood with the girl's grandmother in sympathy. Mecías strummed the strings of my hammock as he went by and looked at the sick girl warily. Xiomara appeared, carrying her baby brother Miguelito, turned on the radio to Colombian salsa, and stood around.

From where I lay I could see the dogs wrestling with each other like a paradigm of all fraternal struggles. Here the big brother was black and strong, the little brother white and less macho, or at least more often at the receiving end of pelvic thrusts. Like the Waorani kids Kowane and Tuna: brothers, best friends, sworn enemies, who do most things together and try to mount each other to keep in shape. Iron sharpens iron, skill increases skill. Like Arabs and Jews trying to screw each other. It's an old, old game.

Like the two sides of my personality, too, the strong and the weak. Like my family. Cuauquillo is Uncle Pat, Potente is my dad.

As I gazed on the canine war game, I remembered Joaquín giving me his take on the two of them. *Potente is lazy, he said. He doesn't like to go out hunting. That's why he's so thin. Cuauqui loves to hunt, but he's a liar. He'll bark and bark at a burrow that an animal has just run out of.*

Mariano returned with popcorn, animal crackers, instant coffee, and powdered milk, and Maribel prepared and served breakfast.

At nine in the morning, the girl's mother and aunt arrived in a motor canoe to take Yerbi and her grandparents home. Maribel talked with the mother, who cried and hugged the older woman.

No sooner had they left when two visitors landed another canoe on the beach and walked up the path: a charismatic, fifty-something guy and a tall, strongly-built lady with a brilliant smile. After chatting with Maribel for a while, they drew near me. The man shook my hand and said, "I'm Serafín Piaguaje. Maribel's nephew. This is my wife, Alba." He told me he wasn't a shaman but he supported the practice. He'd never drunk yagé. When the

missionaries came and shut down the ceremonies, his uncle Francisco had been preparing him to be the next shaman-chief. He was ten years old then. The missionaries hired him to teach them Paicoca, and with him, they derived the system of orthography for the language. They taught him to read and write in Paicoca and Spanish, and he became the first literate Secoya. He went on to school elsewhere and graduated as the first Secoya teacher, then came back to the community and taught the younger generation.

He touched on yagé with a bright, teacherly smile. “August is the best month to drink it,” he said, “because then the sky is closest to the earth. Spirits of the dead who live up there in the form of stars transform into birds, and swoop down to feed on fresh fruit in the tops of trees. When we see a shooting star, we can be happy, because it means that an ancestor is having a meal. August is also the month when the jaguar goddess, Wanteancó, is least hostile to humans, and sometimes even lets shamans nurse at her breasts.”

Then, smiling, Serafín and Alba departed.

A third motor canoe purred to the shore. Joaquín was awake by this time, and stumped off to see what was up. He returned buoyant, saying that he was going to go with some tourists and a company called Selvatours on a trip two days downriver to a place called Lagarto Cocha, an old-time Secoya territory on the border with Peru. The tour leader was named David, he told me as he packed his sports bag full of clothes. “You have to meet this guy,” he added. “He’s from the same tribe as you!”

“What tribe?”

“He’s a Jew!” Joaquín clarified, beaming. David himself appeared a moment later, along with the motorist, a mestizo named Carlitos. Both of them apologized for not having room for me, but Carlitos told me that after dropping the tourists off, he’s going to come back out to pick up a second group in Lago Agrio and bring them to Lagarto Cocha. He offered to take me along on that next trip in five days. I can work as an assistant, he said, washing dishes and doing chores, no money changing hands either way. I accepted immediately.

Then they and Joaquín were gone.

I kept searching for the lost button, on and off, for the whole day. It was nowhere to be found.

Yesterday, two days after the ceremony, I woke up in the morning under my mosquito net, lying on my stomach. I turned over, and there, on the sheet, was the belly button, right at the level of my navel.

Had I hypnotized myself into hiding the button somewhere, invented a false set of memories to cover it up, and then replaced it? Had one of the Secoyas snuck up to me during the ceremony, stolen the button off my belly without my noticing, then snuck it inside my mosquito net and underneath my body as I slept? Those explanations seemed no more likely than the possibility that I’d experienced a genuine if very minor miracle—trivial, bizarre, stupendous. Like the episode of the apparition of the devil to both Joaquín and me, this emphasizes to me that the energies we’re dealing with here are real. I’ll never be able to prove it to anyone else, but it was there for me to see.

* * * * *

Colin James

If This Equinox Would Just Get It Over With

During the disorientating walk
back to base camp,
I was breathing pins.
Our guide suffered not.

The descent wasn't brief,
long vines hung in a gathering mist.
The air was atheist.
We rested by a stone kiosk.
I heard the sound of water,
or old Faquir pissing.

The birds were of the rapture variety.
I didn't have the strength
to look that high up.
A pox on your mythical warm air currents,
my ankle joint had locked.

I pushed with hands tense,
knees contoured, senses swollen,
and managed to arrive here
half in and out of you.

* * *

Robbery

When moving from the comforts
of a small town to live in the big city,
relocate near a brothel.
Voices in the dark have no shape,
and fellatio can be endearing.

Mornings are just that.
Fuck tact, respectfully.
The wind in your hair is
from that song you hated.

* * * * *





Homeless in Hawaii

[Travel Journal]

Continued from Cenacle | 94 | October 2015

Directions

I asked the Hawaiian for directions to the auto parts store. This was no small or idle question, and the Hawaiian took great pride in answering. “Gat hoonooo left be at Konokoe, da right Kamakama, no choke be hoo kine.”

Thanking him, I proceeded down the street I was on, confirming to myself why men don’t ask directions of other men. 99.8% chance you’ll get a bullshit answer. I lay around at night dreaming up my own set of directions I’ll give someone who is idiot enough to ask for them. He will treat me like the expert in geography that I am, soaking up every word, while his wife leans across his lap from the passenger side, making tiny noises of understanding, nodding and encouraging me.

I note that all the streets start with a “K,”¹ the male delineation of right, power, and place. I pass Kaumula, Kamleeham, Kanckamulm, but I don’t see what I think he said. I double back and pass Kappaa Avenue, then Kokoni Street, followed by Kahuakona and Kawaihee. How in the hell is a body to find any fucking thing when every name is the same and has five syllables? These Hawaiians have their lineage so far up their asses they really need only one street name: Kolonoscopy Drive! If I Google the parts store, I’ll likely wind up in some shitty part of the island, a Krappa slum.

Architecture

There only seems to be two kinds of architecture here. For a place where all the money of the mainland comes to be squandered, and the median income is \$150K a year, how is it that there is so little variation of design? Where are the Victorians, the Frank Lloyd Wrights, the stucco Spanish villas? Where, indeed, is any building bigger than two bedrooms and an attached tool shed to stuff Grandma in?

Both styles are based on historical constructions of pedestrian imagination. One is the native Hawaiian rock construct. At its best, this amounts to little more than a crappy pyramid, too lazy to build to a point, and made of puny one-man volcanic rocks. Their greatest achievement, King Kamehameha’s palace, could be confused with a state highway road cut.

At one time, these uninspired piles of rubble were topped with maliciously made grass huts and breezy stick buildings that would seasonally rot. At great intervals, the huts would be lethargically replaced for torpid 400-pound palm weaving Hawaiian princesses.

Currently, the best bet for locating this much maternal mass is not in the Sandwich Isles, but the aisles of Walmart. Here they shop for woven wicker from the Philippines. The grass hut seems to be out of fashion with the howlie, as is the modesty of the modern water closet winning out over crapping into a pile of banana leaves. The last remnant of this architectural style is found in parking lot retaining walls for continental franchises such as Barnes and Noble and McDonald’s.

¹ All spellings of Hawaiian streets are approximated by the Author.

Searching the landscape, then, for some design delight that would represent the whims of eccentric millionaires, I am sorely disappointed. Lot after lot is bedecked with only single-story, metal-covered, hip-roof stick bungalows. Instead of Las Vegas display delirium, I'm surrounded by sharecroppers' shacks. Each metal roof is in some state of rust-induced infectious tetanus. This oxidation experiment typically overhangs the boring wood box by three to four feet. The impression is that it rains like a son-of-a-bitch here, although no evidenced erosion or queried locals supports this fact. The roof is ready for the fire hose rain, but instead only dismantles in the wind and flaps thunderously to get a lazy native's attention.

House paint is non-existent here. There appear not to be "blocks" here like in most towns, but only rural straeets heading off in one direction or another from some misplaced intersection. The bunker houses line these avenues in various stages of sagging into the verdant ground.

This building style has me feeling like I'm in some South Seas Japanese prisoner-of-war camp. I can imagine I see a black-booted enemy general waving his stick from the crummy porch. Us soggy Americans stand hang-dogged in ankle mud, barbed wire strung between the banana trees on the perimeter. As I drive through a "neighborhood," I expect to see Chuck Norris dashing between the buildings with an M-16 and necktie headband. His protruding ape lips and swollen beady eyes are furtively peeking around every rotting plank wall.

There evidently has never been any municipal code prohibition about burying the dead on your property here. Just muck out a hole next to the septic tank there and plant Mom.

*There she lies
forever dreaming
that her little life
done had some meaning
now upon her
the gravestone leaning.*

Each home has a family plot. Some granite and marble from the mainland, but often primitive sculptures made of local volcanic stones. Some piled in mounds in the shape of mini-Kamehameha temples. This either easier than digging into the lava rock, or some good reason to weight the ghost down for all time.

*There he lies
beneath these rocks
to prevent his ass
from midnight walks.*

Some are right in the front yard, verdant grass growing on the dynasty past, mowed on Saturday, picnicked upon on Sunday.

*Who-so-ever knows so sweet
The soil where the dead and the dirt do meet
A finer tombstone I never saw than
The rock a-top my mother-in-law*

*This plot with all the relatives near
Under the front yard whence they leer*

Here I plant and weed and mow

Between the flowers the banana trees grow

*And now the fruit is ripe and neat
The ghoulish vitamins have made it sweet*

The 'Aina

Pau! Done. Though the water rises and falls in a hundred shades of emerald green, though the sunlight of the morn illuminates the wispy crown of the twisted Kiawe thorn tree, the lava boulders sit proud and black on the coastline. This beautiful land—it is not me.

To live in love with the deep green of the strawberry guava tree, the majestic elephant ear plants, the foliage so varied in its verdant valleys, there is one green that makes it all possible. Without this one color, all is but a gentle dream from which one wakes, dirty and hungry, isolated from society in this land, an outcast in paradise, shunned, a paradise paved by the green.

Money! Money buys the car or rental to travel between the beaches, the snorkel to see the fish, the dinner to dine on the sand. No seventy thousand dollar BMW will pick up the hitchhiker any more, and that's the only kind of car on the island—all of them white. Money buys the bed where the ants don't crawl on you all night, where the elephantiasis mosquitoes don't drill you relentlessly, where dengue fever on a molten sweat-soaked cot is something you read about in a bad adventure story. Money buys the dinner of ginger-basted Ahi with proper vegetables all around. The beach bum digs peanut butter out of a jar with a stick snapped from the nearby tree—if he is prosperous.

The white sand beach where the hippie crashed, with an empty six-pack and a salt-encrusted blanket, is populated with cushy shaded lawn chairs attended to by grumpy Hawaiians, wearing false smiles, carrying fruity alcoholic drinks with tiny umbrellas to the indolent rich.

The trail along the coast now goes behind the mansions, gentrified in places with flowers as an obsequiation to their blatant property rights, but mostly it scrambles through the shadeless lava. A trail for the impoverished traveler, no longer a king's trail, now a pauper's path. As one strolls in the searing sun, glimpses over the walls of the cool and air conditioned palace walls within greet the locked out. The kapu signs—meaning “**Fuck You—Keep Out**”—line the trail, lest a homeless dare to dip in the million dollar natural seep pools of cool fresh water.

So where does the traveler go? Now that their usual haunts are infested with the monied, sealing the poor out? The hotels cost in diamonds. There are no Mom-and-Pop cozy cottages. Only mega-corporate palaces with valets and a vast sucking vacuum for the dollars. There is no camping. On any beach. Kapu. *Pay or stay away.*

The locals, the kama'aina as they are called (people of the land), all have houses. If they are Hawaiian, the government has given them a house. Also, healthcare and Food Stamps. They can stuff themselves to 400 pounds on a potato chip/soda pop diet. They can avail themselves of the diabetes clinic without any sort of employment or even flashing a dime. It is for them a symbol of status to be grossly overweight, as it was in the day of the historic Hawaiian kings and queens.

But now it so much easier to be royalty. Open the mailbox, pull out the government checks, and the glory of civilization is yours to glut on. The Hawaiian is on par with the



Courtesy of Charlie Beyer



Courtesy of Charlie Beyer

millionaire howlies, the white umbrella-drink drinkers. The Hawaiians have lost the battle for their land, but won the war with welfare.

So what does a hippie do? The ones without Hawaiian family, houses to live in, beer, and Spam? The ones who are not plugged into the cyber-connected castles? The ones who can only scrape together the plane fare to paradise, planning to eat the papaya off the public tree? The tree that is now behind the wealthy wall.

We are these homeless in Hawaii. Beach gypsies. Excluded from the luxuries of paradise, chased out of glory from dusk to dawn, slipping in the shadows between one beach and the next. Hiding in the bushes as the sun falls, stealing fruit from the elite-owned trees, living on gas station coffee, blending in with bourgeois beach bastards during the day.

But we transits have our secrets. We have found the last places with no rules. We have the Aloha. They have the bills. Aloha-ha-ha. For us, the sun sets in a thousand crimsons and oranges. For us, a few more stick scrapings out of the peanut butter jar for dinner. For the rich, a gagging teriyaki steak choked down to the insistently whiny Hawaiian music. We find coconuts and spend a half hour getting them open, rewarded with the cool liquid inside, the hidden fresh white meat. The rich pay twenty dollars for a sugary cocktail whose coconut water was processed and pasteurized in Pennsylvania.

We have found the beaches and ragged coast lines where property is still just land. Where there are no fences, no walls, no "Keep Out" signs. We share these places with each other, with mice, with tree rats, with eight-inch centipedes, with jabbering wild birds, with the thorn trees, with the fish, with the stars, with the emerald water, and with the ghosts of a hundred thousand dead Hawaiians.

Here in the wilds is abundant archeology of which we alone notice. House walls, temples overgrown and crumbling, boulder burial mounds, vast middens of cooked shells. Here the spirits invite us to stay, to eat the fish that glitter before us in the blue crystal sea, to contemplate, to fornicate, to breathe in freedom, to live in the spirit of Aloha, "in the presence of the breath of life."

So let the walled-in fuckers choke on their pastries, let their skin burn raw under the chemicals they slather themselves with. We brown to coconut color, skinny down to movie star shapes, our eyes are clear and our hair bleached. We have the last laugh living in nature, living homeless in Hawaii. Wild Hawaii.

But still, this is all a hippie's dream. Still the peanut butter must be bought. Still the bedding from Coleman camping gear must be packed in from Walmart. Still Scott toilet paper holds our ass hostage in its grip. We are still slaves to the green dollar. We cannot get here or get away without it. We do not have a canoe loaded with pigs to float a 6000-mile journey—we have a jet that demands high-octane fuel from Saudi Arabia.

So this land cannot be ours, as much as we'd like it to be. We cannot pay the mortgage on this shit. We will never be paid by the government to wallow in our indigenous rights, our self-imposed squalor and potato chips. The hippie howlie will never be the kama'aina. Nor will we ever be given two weeks' vacation by Intel, Microsoft, or Google to go find Aloha in a \$2000-a-night hotel room. We can only search it in the overlooked corners. We can only trespass. We can only enjoy the crumbs the enclaved leave behind. We can only habituate the places they don't want, the places they don't know about, the ones not on the tourist agenda. We hide in plain sight, but out of reach, our mentors being



Courtesy of Charlie Beyer

the Indian mongoose and the feral cats.

But we must go back. Hawaii is a Stalin fist of finance that we can never afford. To stay . . . we must pay. So we must call Aunt Gertrude in New Jersey and beg our return plane fare. We must promise to get honest jobs on the mainland. We must return to the responsibilities of a good American, working endlessly for starvation wages, going ever further into debt. We cannot escape our destiny as drudges. We cannot be the nymphs of paradise as nature intended. But . . . we might . . . we might try again.

End

I sometimes worry that my descriptions are too far on the dark side. That I snark and complain like an American, unappreciative of my privilege to be here, rather than the default—a concrete prison cell shared with a 300-pound sex maniac. But all in all, life is by no means dark. If we wanted dark, we could have gone to the Barrios in Guatemala City.

No, to the contrary, this Hawaiian world is beautiful, barely tamed, abundant in strange and unusual life, and decorated with mostly nude people. Even the earth churns in creative geology, blowing its million-year breaths of fire, ever adding the earth's core to the land above.

So I contend that I am not a snark. Only that I am in awe. Hence, the last day in Hawaii is an appreciation of the 'aina, the land, the miracle of its existence, the miracle that we can leap across the ocean and be here. So, possibly it is more boring to say nice things, but I feel I must. I must write of the wonder.

June 2nd

Last day on the island. A night of beauty, hidden on a pocket beach, under a full moon, a light love making, a soft breeze from the sea, 85 degrees, the tumble of the surf before us. We awake refreshed. Aloha'd. We drift back down the seaside trail, weaving between the palms, the ground a kaleidoscope of spiky shadows all around us. This leads us to Spencer Park where we have left the car and avoided the camping fee. A gas station coffee and hot Spam sandwich dined slowly by the sea, awakening birds arguing and scrambling for lost breakfast crumbs.

We read the local paper in the luxury of the tropical beach and joke with Big Mike, a transit we have made acquaintance with. Big Mike and I are both old time Seattleites, so we can banter through a story mentioning streets and surrounding towns without skipping a beat. He is a fine bullshitter who's only topic is himself, but for 45 minutes he is amusing.

Then we're off. Rather than sit here and listen to Mike all day—waiting for the hours to tick

off before our evening flight—we decide to walk a stretch of the King's Highway. This is a four-foot-wide trail, running for 50 miles down the island's side, as straight as a Nazca Line. The architecture is incredible, given that no tools were used, no mortar, nothing other than the surrounding rock and some primitive unknown surveying method. Knee-high walls line each side, their flat faces fitted in such a way that they could stand up to the edge of any ruler.

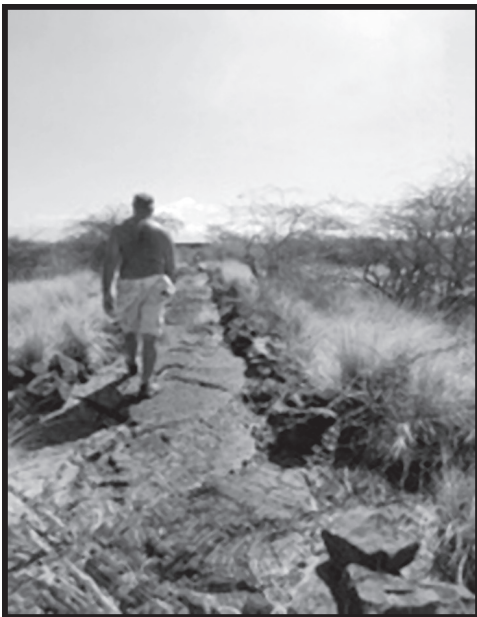
Where dips and hills are encountered in the terrain, the walls are built up on either side, and the center filled with $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch crumbled lava. There are stretches up to 400 feet long, and elevated a dozen, which slice through the turbulent terrain. Where the trail (really a pre-historic freeway) crosses great expanses of pahoehoe, the smooth lava, the highway design is naturally incorporated into the landscape. I find this ancient construction so amazing. I think of the slave minions, laboring under this molten sun, carefully placing each jagged rock to fit perfectly with the others. What devotion to their King, devotion to their craft, their industry. Of course, the lazy were smashed with stones to the cranium, so there was incentive to make this rock road—other than the Christmas bonus.

We leave this trail, this ancient and forgotten highway, and take a ratty bull-dozed road to the beach. But first we must circumnavigate a multi-million dollar compound of the elite, surrounded with barbed wire and kapu signs. This coconut grove, once the orchard of the Hawaiian kings, now an ostentatious mansion zone for a privileged few.

In a half-mile we come out onto a massive black sand beach speckled with brilliant white blobs of coral. The surf waves are tremendous, crashing against the steeply sloping beach, a chorus of pebbles tinkling in the retreat, only to be hurled forward again. The sun shines through the waves curling in glowing turquoise and green. The yellow orb is actually blazing.

It's around 95 out here with reflection off everything. I have decided to give my tan a final tuning, as I know that the Colorado return is sloppy with rain and spring cold. I go Mr. Natural without a shirt. I could have put my head in a microwave set on turkey thaw for the same effect. I am cooking in a big way, feeling every intense ultraviolet ray bore into my skin. We meander down the beach, around the point to a large scattering of coral chunks glowing on the black sand. We languidly pick our way along as we collect translucent water polished bits of coral. I am getting woozy from overheating. Death Valley prospectors come to mind.

But we have a plan. To get to the Golden Ponds. The fresh water ponds nestled in the wildest of the a'ā lava. A hidden jewel of Hawaii. The Hawaii only I and a handful of others know. There is a secret trail we take into the razor sharp lava, and soon we reach our own private paradise. Surrounded by Hala trees and shrubs, the deepest pool glitters like a golden bowl before us. A golden algae coats the lava underwater, softening it, illuminating it. Furiously stripping off my shorts, I dive in, instantly going from a skin temperature over 100 to a refreshing 80. The cool water is *bliss, bliss, bliss*. Reviving bliss. Bliss with 3-inch fish, who play about us, curious and tame without predators or even visitors. This place is the greatest secret. This is the breath of life, the Aloha of the 'Aina.



Courtesy of Charlie Beyer

After swimming, we know we must move on, leave Aloha, return to civilization, resume the routines. I soak my shirt and hat to keep me cool for a half an hour while they evaporate. A fast march down the beach, past the kapu pools and palms, into the half-dozen miles of no-man's camping zone. Coral sand, wild and untrod, beautiful in its unscathed state from development. Then through the Kiawe trees. An hour's walk across the black and glittering lava.

Then showers in the park and packing everything, throwing out half. We make a “free” pile of stolen hotel towels, some of which are quite nice, and toss whatever else is usable on the heap. Like a few coconuts.

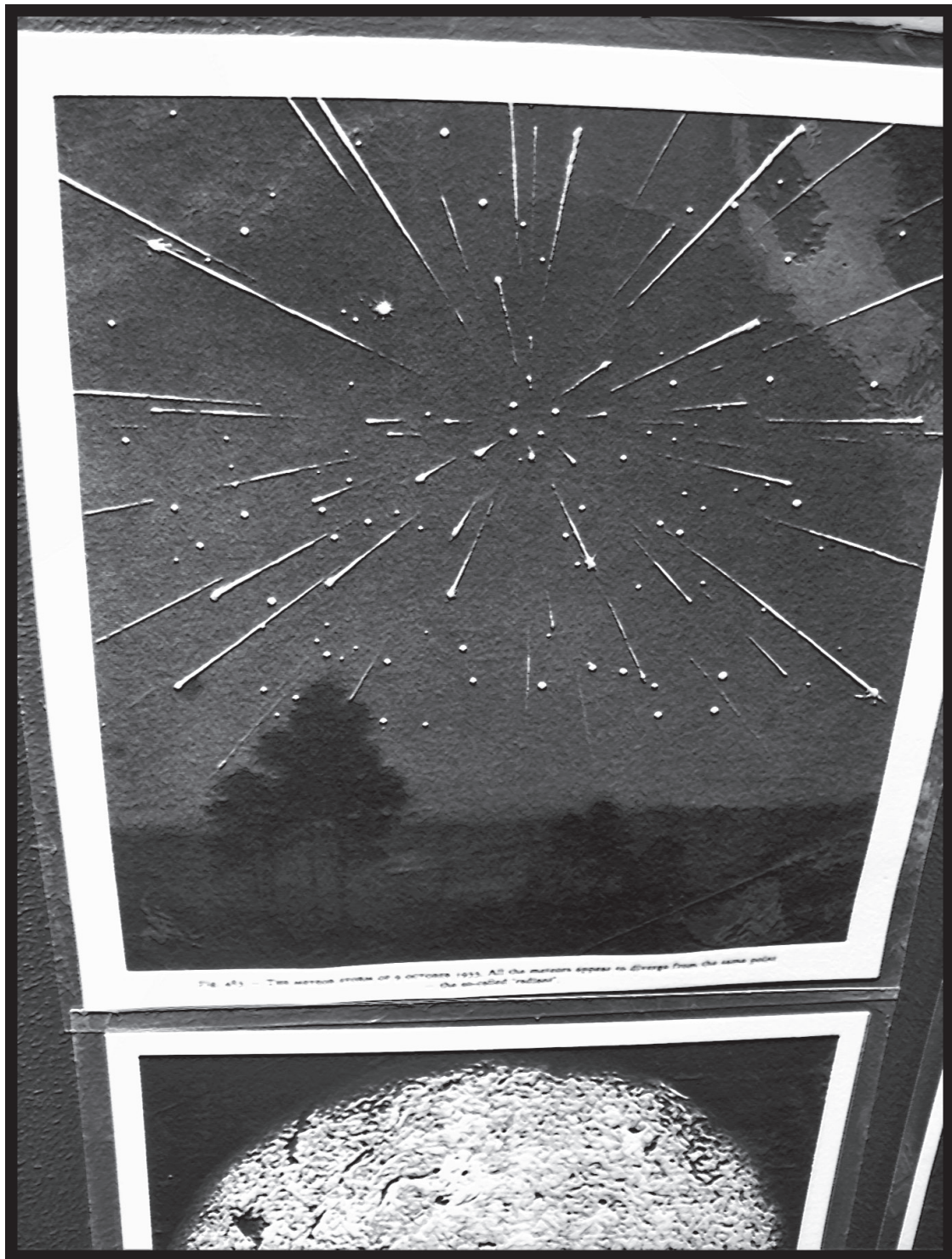
Finally, our descent into civilization. Thirty hours of airports and fast food later, we are back in our village in Colorado.

Good-bye, beautiful Hawaii. Would that I could be re-incarnated as a native, or at least a millionaire, so I could be welcomed here. We will miss you. Your simplicity. Your fish. Your suntan. Stay unscathed if you can.



Courtesy of Charlie Beyer

* * * * *



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Many Musics

Tenth Series

*"But I'm tryin', Ringo.
I'm tryin' real hard to be the shepherd."
—Quentin Tarantino, Pulp Fiction, 1994.*

xlix. Fireworks

There were fireworks over the river
one night when I was very small.
I watched, hoisted up on shoulders,
shifted one to the next, half-asleep
& thinking the sky was exploding
in many colors. Wondering what
we'd do now that the world had ended.

I learned later that a Peace-maker
had come, & the fireworks celebrated
his ending the wars among several
old tribes. Hadn't got the peace he'd
sought, since this one meant the largest
of the several took full command, &
the rest now a knee & oath to its king
alone. So the world did rather end
that night, in the sky, & below.

We were assimilated slowly, not by
killing our men, raping our women,
carrying the young off. More by rules,
strictures, the coming of teachers &
priests to smooth arguments about
human purpose, life & death, to how
the victors believed. The Peace-maker
kept our bodies unkilld but lost us
most of the rest.

The old ways continued, hidden,
unspoken of by daylight. Most of
our tribe didn't know this, couldn't,
& gradually let go our ancient belief
of a home Island from which all men
came, & a magic structure on it
that revealed all of life's source & purpose.

I was the son of the old King's closest
 advisor, strongest conscience, dearest
 friend. By which, not intelligence or
 sensitivity, I was one night led
 from the tent I shared with my father
 & sister far from the encampment
 we all still maintained by the sea.
 We were fisher folk, before & after
 conquest.

To the Woods, a fair walk & then
 climb up into the hills. Hurried,
 urgently hurried to move, swiftly &
 silently. Into the Woods, unslowing,
 no path followed but now I heard
 in the several cloaked figures
 around me a low music, a *humming*,
 & we moved unceasing for an hour
 or more until a clearing among
 the trees, the full moon shining
 down, the light so bright & glaring
 I could blink & see a kind of
 exotic building formed by its light
 & shadows. Entered the clearing,
 maybe the building too.

Only then did those around me pull
 off the hoods, their cloaks entirely.
 My father, other men of our tribe,
 but not the King.

"Why not our King?"

"He is watched. He cannot come yet."

"What is this?"

One of the older men answered. Tall,
 a long slender beard, had rarely spoken
 or looked at me previously.

"We won't let a necessary peace efface
 us our history. We will fight no more
 but our history, our myths, will keep
 by these gatherings."

"They don't know then?"

"No. They would misunderstand this
 as threat."

More figures emerged into the light.
 All men. I questioned this too.

“We can’t have them hurt or named traitors. They have their ways of remembering too. Preserving.”

I could think of no more questions to ask, knowing they only answered me by respect to my father. Nodded.

Twas then that a more full circle formed around the clearing, each man & the few boys like me took the hands of both on his side, clasped tightly, & a low *hmmm*, I don’t know from who first, began to emerge, barely more than colored breathing at first, then deeper & greater, & rising & falling back, like ocean waves, & within it something more, I closed my eyes, tried to listen my way to it, could not, opened my eyes again, & saw marvels indeed.

Among us, & back in the trees around the clearing, were these Creatures, & they too were *hmmming*. I saw a White Bunny, brown & black & spotted bears, several giraffes, a purple furred dancing thing, even bloo-eyed kittees, among countless others, they were all close to us, & sharing this *hmmming* as though we all belong to it somehow.

I don’t remember returning, just waking on my usual old matt by usual morning. I lastly remember, like the dream it seemed, looking up at the stars & seeing how low they hung, how wondrously low to all of us in that clearing.

My father dressing, smiling at me.
 Nudging me to get my boots & gear
 together. A smile the size & slyness
 of a wink.
 My sister helping me, bossing me
 as she did. Her own smile free of
 that night's secret magical events.
 But her own nights, I knew, & hoped,
 & smiled too, & tugged on my boots, &
 readied for the day's work at fishing.

l. Little Purse

I'd had it with me for seeming
 all my days, a sweet secret of a thing,
 with its mysteries deeper in.
 But for nobody else. This seemed
 important, seemed almost like
 another had my promise of secrecy.

A little blue-green purse, hardly big as my
 hand's palm, a simple zipper at its top.
 Its design, however, was like the
 most dense storybook in my hand,
 telling me, or trying to tell me, the story
 of the world's beginning, prosper, decline, end.

I don't know how the images on it
 could shift, change, enlarge,
 diminish to mine eye. I only knew
 for sure that if anyone neared
 when I was in study of it, the images
 would freeze, terror? I wasn't sure.
 But into my cloak, under my matt,
 almost like an "or else" in it.

Often a great cavern deep under
 earth, & the great tree in its center,
 & sometimes I could see close enough
 to study its branches, as though
 I perched like a bird on one, or
 curl far below at its trunk, look up
 & up, & feel I was not alone, that
 many looked up with me.

Sometimes a great Castle on a tall hill,
 on an Island, like the old myths,
 I would concentrate when this image
 came, sometimes would be let
 to enter through its tall tall door,
 to roam long crimson lit hallways,
 see figures moving about that did
 not know of me or mine.

Rarely, most rarely, a structure so
 great I could not fathom its size
 or reck its purpose. I would stand
 beneath its great arch, looking up
 & up to it. Letters, words up there?
 I didn't know. It seemed to matter.
 Once, only once, my little purse had
 let me walk in, pass the archway.

Within, as somewhat strange, were
 several trinkets I studied over & over,
 caressing them with my fingers, weighing
 them in my palm. There were two golden coins,
 a small dice, a device like a tool for connecting,
 & a little white game piece. Each seemed
 important, & together like part of a language
 I had the wrong kind of mind to know.
 But I was patient, this was gift, this
 was secret, me to shape my mind to kind.

The night after brought to the White Woods,
 same mind but wild with wonder over
 what I'd been allowed, I tugged out my
 blue-green little purse from where I'd
 hid it in my old matt, kept it deep under
 my brown blanket to study.

The purse glowed in the darkness of
 my hands, its images shifted unsettled
 between great castle, tree, archway.
 Restless, like I'd never seen it, & I felt
 it vibrate in my hand. *Hmmmming?* Like we
 had in those White Woods? Then I knew
 it wanted me to zip it open, examine
 the trinkets anew.

The two golden coins in my hand also
 kept shifting images, faster & faster.
 The small dice its spots danced one side
 to others, what game was this?
 The connector piece seemed softer
 in my hand than before, almost
 like a finger pointing, pointing me.

The game piece was still in the purse
 but no longer white & inert. Now it looked
 back at me with a merry laughing face.
 A . . . Creature? Like in those Woods?
 I lay the purse on my open hand to
 allow it exit if wished. It, she,
 walked out onto my palm, bent
 to sniff & gnaw a little, then look
 up at me like she was the prize I'd won.

Stirrings in the tent. My father, always
 tired, slept deep till dawn. My sister,
 however, could stir in a feather of light.
 Always watching me, too, a spy for any
 fun I might be having alone, any secret
 I might know without her.

I didn't breathe. The little purse's glow
 dimmed as though to my desperate wish.
 She stirred again, then all silent & still.
 I looked under again at the strange little
 miracle of a prize.

Opened my hand & there she was,
 the tiniest little pandy bear one could
 imagine. Hardly three thoughts high,
 dressed in a red & orange skirt,
 looking at me like I pleased her every wish,
 maybe like the whole world pleased her every wish.

I wanted to talk to her, to ask her
 every possible question, but could not.
 This was more secret than ever.

I finally tried something, the single
 way I could think to greet her.

I closed my eyes, hoping, daring, &
 recalled me the *hmmm* that had
 led all of us to that clearing in the
 White Woods. I *hmmm'd* it again
 in my mind, hoping, hoping she could
 hear me, my awe & pleasure of her.

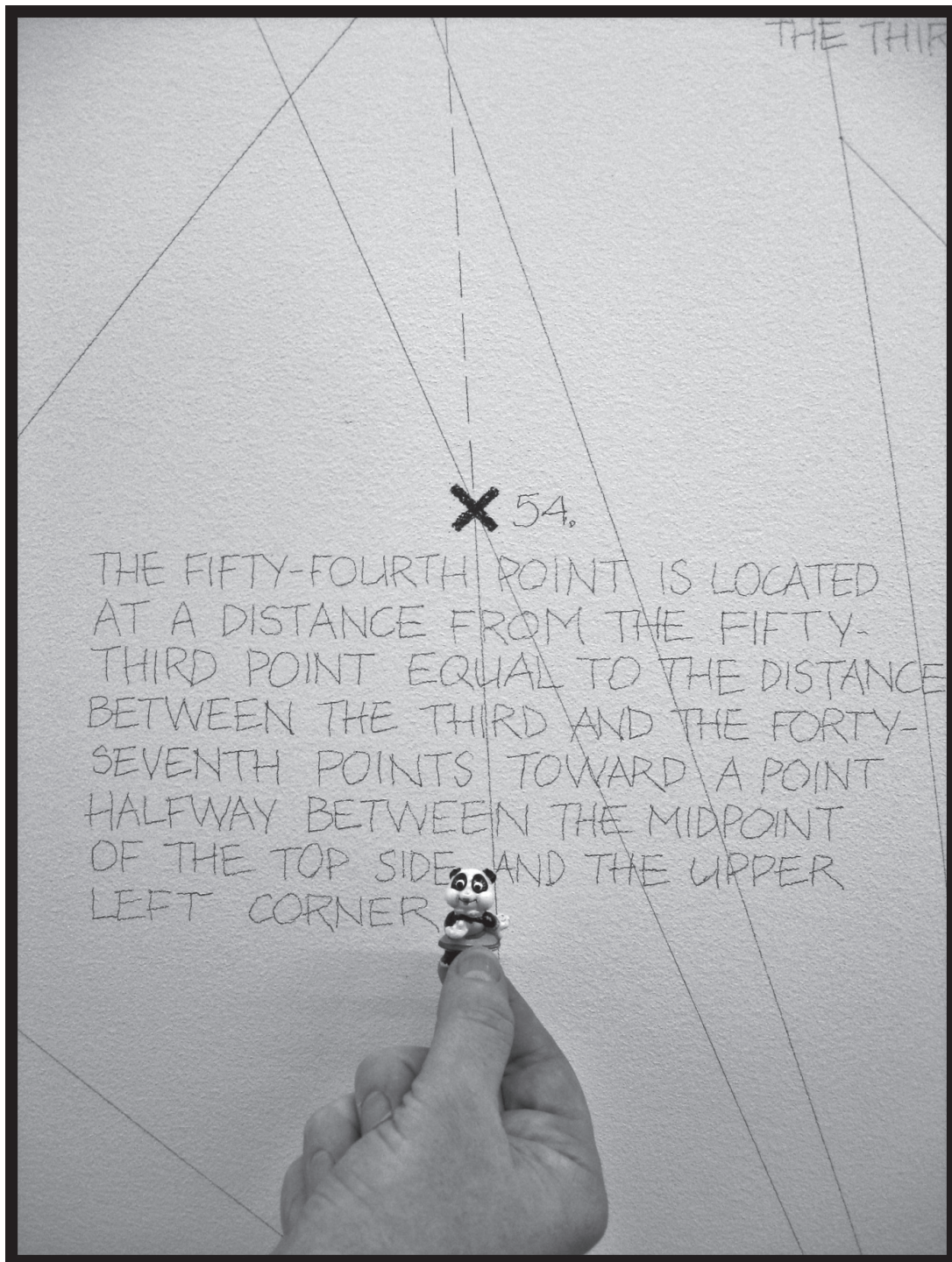
There was at first a kind of a laugh,
 a chuckle, a cackle, as though to say
 she heard me, & then it gave way
 to the *hmmming* that I was still trying.
 She calmed me, helped me slow &
 deeper within, swim, fly, *dream*
 in the sugarskyhigh liquid jewel
 of *hmmming*. As I relaxed, I felt like
 others were with us. Near as the trinkets
 in my own coin purse. Far, far, in miles
 & centuries & worlds. Molecules & supernovas.

I was not alone. My small tribe of
 half-assimilated souls *was not alone*.
 There were truths greater & deeper than
 men could reckon & compel upon each
 other, stranger strengths bide this
 world. We were like lovely notes among their
 long, long tunes.

Again, I slept, slept into this cosmic
 music, wherein all were safe, &
 when I woke by morning I could feel
 the obscure bump in my matt,
 that only I knew meant something
 wonderful.

I wondered all day as I cast out
 nets, hauled in fish, laughed like
 some other boy I'd been, with people
 I loved so much more now it terrified
 me. I wondered if she would be again
 in the coin purse, if I would again
 hold her lightly in my palm, if
 we would *hmmm* together again.

I started to laugh suddenly, to cackle
 out loud, & *yes*, & *of course*, &
 wonderful it was, all of it,
 wonderful to know so little but
 now *trust so much*.



li. Great Cavern

I wondered what my sister knew.
 I wondered what all the girls knew.
 There was one girl I wondered more
 than the rest.
 There was one girl I wondered what
 she thought of *me*.

Her hair a blondish-red, light & long &
 never combed. Her eyes turquoise &
 knew many secrets, real & imagined.

She was good at fishing, as any boy or man
 among us. Strong, lithe, throwing nets
 or when allowed on the long boats.

I watched her, more & more. The work
 didn't contain her, like it did most
 of them. She'd look up at the sky, study
 the stranger clouds. Sometimes she
 would study a single fish from a
 heavy net's haul. Sometimes smile
 'witching at it, toss it back to the waters.

She hadn't always been among us.
 Had come while the tribes still warred.
 No explanation, one of the ancient women
 took her in & that was that.

I wondered what she knew. I thought of her
 turquoise eyes, her lithe figure throwing nets,
 & wondered what she was. I knew men
 & women desired each other's bodies,
 schemed to lie together, dance & control
 each other, a peculiar obsession, but
 this didn't seem that. *I just wondered
 what she knew.*

Until the day came I saw more. Morning . . .
 No, it wasn't yet. It was me dreaming
 of the places my coin purse showed
 me, of how the ceremony in
 the White Woods was part of something
 else, something more.

It was me waking up & for a moment
 breathless, listening. Father, deep
 breathing, like always. Sister . . .
 listen . . . listen . . . nothing. Best
 there was with her. Maybe lucky
 this time.

It was me digging out my little purse
 & crawling like quicksilver through
 the tent. I wanted to see my new little
 friend. It was still dark, campfires
 cold & out. The war over, our tribe
 part of a larger clan now, we no
 longer kept all night guards. Some of
 our men would travel some miles
 away to the new borders. Me too one day.

It was me running low & swift to
 the hills, wanting to be just inside
 those White Woods. Seemed safest place
 to let her out.

Just entering them, crossing among
 the first few, & I felt the *hmmmming*
 everywhere. It wasn't dangerous,
 didn't seem. It wasn't about me
 at all, I quickly realized. *It was her.*

I kneeled low, opened my purse,
 let her walk out, big & bold,
 height of shortness. She sniffed around,
 cackled a bit, & suddenly shot away
 among trees ahead. Cackling in my mind:
Follow my play! Follow quick!

I picked up my purse & away through
 these pathless Woods. She guided me
 along, following her, I didn't think but
 to follow. *This is all part of the same
 thing. I have to know why.*

Then she urged me slow, very slow.
 I obeyed, & stepped soundlessly through
 thicker trees. A movement ahead, a clearing.
 I curled silent behind a tree, shrouded
 but for my eyes to see.

It was her. She was nude. She was slender.
Beautiful. What doing? *She was not alone.*

Dancing? Dancing. With a . . . White Bunny?
They resembled each other. Long hair,
long ears. Loose & flowing. Sometimes they
spun by each other, sometimes seemed
to hop high like they *both* were bunnies.

Light pattered into the clearing, a soft
finger at a time. Suddenly they both
looked up, sniffed. *Sniffed.* Two white
flashes & were gone, twice less than a breath.

Luckily my little friend was somewhere
nearby, & cared me continue my
spying. Led me along a fierce pace,
the cackles in my mind wild
with delight. Led me toward a tall,
dark cave. Completely dark, despite
the dawn.

“Don’t slow! No time! No time!” I heard
in my mind. Heeding the voice,
& trying not to wonder at this,
I walked at a quick pace
into the cave.

Something in here, not quite a Creature,
no. Grasped my tall boy’s form,
frowned. I saw flashes of burning
forests, of great cities polluting coastal
waters, of mountainous factories erupting
thick black poisons into the air.
All deeds of men.

“Wait! Please! I’m sorry for all that!
I came here because my friend
brought me. She’s a Creature. She meant
no hurt! I mean none. I was following
a girl. One of my tribe. *Please.*”

A long moment, like I am considered
between two ancient claws.
“She does not belong to you,” a voice says,
impossibly deep & low in me. Then
silence, & nothing. I walk through
the dark cave & find a tunnel at
its back. Lit enough for me to pick
my way along.

“Slowly! Slowly!” says my little friend
 with, for her, restrained cackling glee.
 The tunnel is long but eventually gives
 way to a great great cavern, impossibly
 tall &, in its wondrous center, a great tree
 I had seen on my little purse, whose
 branches I had perched on, sat with
 others far below! I kneeled low behind a rock.

There she was, dressed in something
 gauzy, hair decorated in a viney
 crown of stones & blooms. She was
 asleep among many, many Creatures,
 as though this her home & all
 that back there a dream. I saw
 the White Bunny, some bears of brown
 & black, a grey hedgehog. A striped
 lemur, a little pretty-maned lion cub.
 So many others.

I didn't move. I didn't breathe.
 All I could think was: *I don't belong here.*
 I *wish* I belonged here too.

Then my little friend tickled me inside
 my mind & said: “Look!” & her turquoise
 eyes flitted open & looked right to me
 where I hid! Froze me, pinned me.
 Curious, wondering, amused. A little shy.
 Just a little. Again, somehow, I felt
 held delicately & examined close.

I panicked. I wrenched wild & loose &
 ran back through the tunnel & out the cave,
 & into the White Woods, & would have
 been easily lost if my little friend's
 cackle hadn't guided me, mercifully,
 back & back & back to the edge of
 the White Woods, relief panting.

Yet still dawn. Like I had been
 traveling for an elongated ten seconds
 or less. I sat down, suddenly, within
 the first few trees of the White Woods,
 sat down exhausted. Unknowing what.
What?

I hear a cackle behind me, low to
the ground. Hear it with my ears.
My little friend, looking up at me with
her calm wild delight. I hold out
my hand. Steps upon. A sniff, a gnaw.
Agreeably into my little purse.

I make my way quick & quiet back
to my matt & blanket. Purse
tucked secret away. Allow me a breath
then.

My sister rolls over to face me.
Smiles. A real, rare one. "You saw her?
With them?"

I nod wordless.
She smiles again, nods.
"Now we can tell each other what we know."

lii. Liminal

It's raining, & I'm not ready to talk
to my sister, about the girl Iris,
or what magick treasures contained in
my blue-green little purse. It's raining
& there's no fishing today. She's out
with the girls & women, cooking up
the breakfast. But she'll be back, &
she'll corner me in our tent.

So I put on our father's rough overcoat
which he often eschews as too heavy
for his needs, stuff my little purse in
one of its deep pockets, & sneak my
way through the encampment.
Notice again the wooden structures
being built in a cleared area at
a distance.

"Our new homes & lives yonder," says
sudden a deep & beautiful voice
that almost mindless thrills me.
My King. I kneel immediately, as
ever. He's always kind to me though.

"No more kneeling, Odom."
 I keep my head low, don't move.
 "Stand, son. Now." Gentle but a command
 like a wall. His hand helps me up.

"Walk with me." He keeps my hand,
 about three times my height, it seems
 to mine eye & heart. We walk toward
 those buildings, still skeletons of
 intent. Nobody working on them
 in this rain.

"This will be a meeting hall for all,
 where we will be told what to think,
 & do. Be praised or scolded by our response."

Leave that great building, pass a
 few smaller ones, perhaps dwellings,
 & come to an even greater one.
 Already rises dizzying into the sky.

"What is this one, my King?"
 "They call it a church. It's where
 they worship."
 "Worship?"
 His long long hair damp but his bloo
 eyes blanket me & yet cup me close.

"They believe men are set apart from
 the other living things of the world."
 "Set apart? How?"
 "Special. Unique. Superior. Like this
 world belongs to us."

I listen. I think. I work these words
 back & forth. He is patient.

"So what happens here?"
 "They commune with each other & with
 a supernal being that made the world
 & rules it."
 "A being. Like a king?"
 "No. A creator. From whose breath &
 will & hand emerged all that is."

I look at him. I forget he is King.
 "But we are not set apart. We fish
 for our food. We burn wood for
 our fires. We use leaves & roots & berries
 for our medicines."

He nods.

“Will we have to come here?”

He nods again. “I think so.”

“Do you believe these things?”

He is silent. Long silent. Then he kneels
to me, looks me through my marrow.

“I believe we belong to this world &
am grateful for it. It is a generous
world with enough for us. It feels
to me like we share with all upon it
& within it a part in its origins,
its mysteries, its paths hereon.”

Pauses. Lowers his head very low.

“But, yes, we will come here & share
in their simple praises, sing their simple
selfish songs, offer naïve worship toward
their supernal father.”

“But why?”

“Odom, what do you have in your
pocket?”

I gasp. Stutter. Confess. Confess it all.

“Will the things you’ve experienced
in the White Woods dim by
kneeling in this building?”

I think. “No. They are wonderful
things but real.”

He smiles, stands, again a wonderful
tree’s height above me. “And you’ll
always come when summoned to
the White Woods?”

I nod, nod. *Nod.*

He nods back, calmer. “Then what
you do in here will be praise of those
things you know. As will mine &
the rest of us who keep our stories.”

I want to smile, agree. But don’t.
Reach in my pocket & put my little
purse on my hand to show.
Unzip. Let *her* walk out. She
cackles up at him, pleased.

He cackles back down at her. *Oh.*
 Offers a finger for her to gnaw.
 Smacks her lips. He laughs.

I don't understand but I love him
 & I love little her & I know what I
 feel & have seen. He lets us walk
 back quiet to our camp.

In the tent, my sister is waiting.
 As is Iris. Smiling at me, I am
 cornered by filial love & mysterious
 turquoise eyes.

I nod. Make to sit. They do not.
 Iris speaks. "We know a place.
 Let's hurry." Takes my hand &
 I am led, my sister takes the
 other & I am happy, I don't know
 why, but I know nothing even more.
 Hear a soft cackle in my mind like a kiss.

liii. Treehouse

I am sitting just within the border
 of these strange White Woods, high
 up in a treehouse, old, ancient
 thing, perhaps once a watchman's
 shack for spying who approached.

Sitting with the girl Iris & my sister
 Cordel'a, each one a different grip
 on my heart & mind. I still see Iris's
 nude form dancing with the White Bunny,
 sleeping angelic among her Creatures.

Cordel'a has tendered me so long
 I forget I'm older than her. She guards
 my heart in ways I cannot
 understand, but accept. She knows
 what is, feels it true, & then more so.

No seats in this treehouse, but
 perhaps twas no time for watchmen
 to be sitting, relaxing, napping. A stone
 water jug, cracked near in half, a small
 metal cup, with a pine cone in it. Deliberate?

I look at Cordel'a, her soft blue eyes,
 her ever-neat brown double-braids.
 She wears old cloaks, sweaters, always
 layers of clothes, & leather boots near
 up to her hips. Made our father trade for them.

"You can look at her too. She's no shame
 you've seen her frolic in her skin."
 A mock in it, a laugh, but always loves me.
 So I look at Iris, turquoise eyes,
 hair uncombed. We smile each other. It's OK.

"Tell me what you know then," I say,
 bluffing that my sister will go first.
 Iris speaks. "Odom," her soft mouth
 lingers around my name, or so I dream,
 "These Woods aren't safe anymore."

"Why?"
 "It's the new king. Cordel'a & I've
 snuck around to listen. He feels
 the Woods contain a bad magick,
 one he studies to defeat. His advisors
 urge him to . . . " she stops, choked.

Cordel'a comforts her as she does me
 after a bad dream. I look down, wait,
 listen for the upset to subside. It does.
 Iris looks up at me. Smiles new.
 I wish I could make her ever like that.

I think. "Do we tell my father or
 the King?"
 They shake their heads. "They will
 say we are too few to fight & they
 will not risk more of us dying," Iris says.

"What then?"
 Iris looks directly at me, freezes
 me in her grasp. "You met him.
 In the cave that leads underground
 to where they live."

I think. *Oh*. Think again, remember
 that encounter like a bruise, like it
 could have been much worse.



“What is he? Why would he help us?”
 She keeps her grasp of me still.
 “You saw what he thinks of men.”
 “Yes. I’m surprised he let me pass.”
 She smiles. “You’re my friend.”
 I don’t. “I am your kinsmen. But what
 are you that is special to him, Iris?”

She holds me closer, if that’s possible.
 “I don’t know, Odom. I am a girl,
 pretty, one you admire. But for him,
 this form, he sees something else.
 There is a bond between us because of it.”

I grasp her back, no longer telling
 if just our eyes or her fully in my
 arms now. “Where are you from,
 Iris?”

Silence. Then: “I am from the sea.”
 “Like a sea fairy?”
 “I don’t know.”

I pull back, suddenly. No, am pulled
 back. Cordel’a is impatient, not
 yet a fan of young romance.

I nod. “What do we do?”

“We go to him together. Tonight.”
 I think, my head between my legs,
 studying the floorboards of this
 watchman’s hut, our treehouse.

Look out toward our encampment,
 & the wooden village building up beyond it.

“Could their king really fell these magick
 White Woods?”

Silence. Then Iris: “My friend in
 the cave fears men will ruin this
 world as they have done many others.”

I think of my little purse & its wonderful
 little inhabitant. Of the ceremony
 I was allowed to share with the
 men of my tribe & the Creatures.
 Of Iris & that cavern.

It seems hopeless to array
 a Beast in a cave against what
 iron & fire purposeful, fearful men
 can wield. Seems hopeless to believe
 the Woods will elude conquer
 anymore than our King did.

But I stand, & I take each of their
 hands in standing. We help each
 other down the ladder affixed to
 the tree trunk. We crouch among
 the trees until dusk, easier to return.

Cordel's hand keeps mine closer even
 as Iris's seems to evanesce.
 Her deep ruts in my heart remind
 me she is real, & yearn her near
 again very soon.

liv. Wytner

Wake suddenly, thinking my little purse
 is gone, feeling under my matt,
where is it? where is she? The tent
 is longer somehow, its ceiling wooden
 not old canvas. I stand without having
 to crouch. My father's rough overcoat still
 on me, I walk toward a lit room.
 Only one real thought: *where is she?*

The walls are the same rough dark fibers
 of my overcoat. I'm trying to remember
 something else, something that would help
 me, *someone*. I'm barefoot. No, wait,
 I'm bare pawed? Sharp, small claws,
 clicking along the wooden floor. That room
 isn't nearing, I begin to run. Click louder.

Arrive to a crowd of people, all strangely
 much taller than me, dressed thickly
 in dark rags & furs, I try to push among
 them, looking up, trying to see a face.
 Then a face, the elder with the long
 thin beard, from the ceremony in
 the Woods. "Please? What is this?"

He leads me away, into a shadow,
 shows me the box in his arms. Roughly
 presses it into my arms. "These are our
 memories, Odom. We can each only take
 one. Go ahead, choose." He seems to drift
 back to the crowd as I look at objects
 that remind me of loved ones & things.
 Two brown double braids, like my sister's.
 Big, worn boots like my father's. A viney
 crown of stones & blooms, like the girl Iris's.

Then I'm holding it. *My blue-green little purse.*
Empty. I cry out. Keep crying, blindly,
 crying out, *shaking, shaking, & shaking.*

"Odom! Wake up! We have to go!" Cordel's
 impatience cracks my nightmare. Her double-braids
 in place. *Oh.* Oh. Usual tent. I've fallen asleep
 in my father's overcoat on my matt.
 Reach in my pocket, heedless if she sees
 me do so. Blue-green purse, zipped, thick
 with contents. Take a breath finally,
 look dumbly at her.

"We have to meet her now."
 Continue looking dumbly.
 "Iris? Your true love?"
Oh. I nod. Stand. Her little patience now
 gone, she grabs my hand & we leave
 the tent, dark enough to move quickly
 through encampment toward the hills
 leading to the White Woods.

"Cordel'a."
"Shhh."
"Cordel'a, stop."
 She does. Looks at me. Patient again.
 That happens sometimes.

"Shouldn't we tell the King, or our
 father?"
 "She doesn't want to. You know that."
 "Why are you listening to her? You never listen
 to anyone."
 She laughs, a real pretty laugh jingling
 from her pretty ocean blue eyes.
 Now I wait. Now I'm patient.

She looks down. "She knows things, Odom."

"What things?"

"If we don't do this, bad things will happen to all of us."

"What does she know?"

Not answering, she takes my hand & we continue our climb up the hill to the White Woods.

"Where do we meet her?"

"Don't worry."

"Cordel'a, how do we find her?"

She's quiet, won't stop walking, won't let go of my hand.

I stop. To her dirty look, I pull out my coin purse from my pocket. Unzip. I gently make her hand open, & empty the purse onto her palm. Including *her*.

She comes out, shorter & greater than ever, & sniffs Cordel'a's palm. Cordel'a's eyes sparkle with delight. She gnaws the palm a couple of times, just for show, & looks up crazy-eyed at me. "We need to go to Iris." Not a word, maybe a cackle, she leaps to the ground, speeds away.

We start running to follow but again the cackles in our minds direct our steps. She hurries us but not in a panic. An hour passes? I don't know how we don't tire but we don't, & then arrive to a clearing.

The same clearing as I was brought to? It feels the same. Full moonlight. The outlines of a building. Its ghostly door opens. Within, a figure, long unbrushed reddish blonde hair, viney crown on her head, stones & blooms. Both her hands out for us. 'Witching smile we both yearn.

Grasping her hand, crossing into the building, everything changes. Daytime, hot high winds. We're in a . . . desert? Iris is hurrying us along, I look back, from nowhere, to seeming nowhere. Her hand pulls me along & I let her, let her, then I suck hard in my breath, & stop.

Turquoise eyes deeper in my mind than
I am.

“What’s wrong, Odom?”

“Where are we going?”

“He’s waiting for us.”

“Who? Where?”

She smiles me like she’s nude again,
dancing & inviting my turn with her
this time.

“Wytner, Odom. We can all talk there.”

“What’s Wytner, Iris? *Tell us.*”

She lets go of Cordel’a’s hand too &
gives us both a strange, plain look.

“Wytner is where he takes the form
of a man. He’ll talk with us. We’ll tell
him our crisis with the new king.”

I want to ask more but she holds out
her hand smiling again, & Cordel’a
takes my other, & I don’t know &
would maybe still not, but a cackle
at my feet. Waiting to return to my,
well, *her* little purse. They let me go
long enough to retrieve my little friend.

Start laughing, despite all this, jingling
voices, & I love them both, & my little
friend, & we hurry along again to Wytner,
& long past knowing all this, I’m just
glad to be with them all.

lv. Braided Hmmm, Part 1

Wytner is where I won Iris, if only
for awhile, & lost Cordel’a, but slowly.
I became what I am there, but lost some
of that smiling green leaf who walked
defiantly with his King through
the town meant to prison us.

What is Wytner? Seemed hardly a town
 at all. Only Iris knew where to go,
 & so only she not surprised when we came
 upon the little shack in nowhere's
 middle of this strange desert. An exotic
 little old man sat on a stool in front
 of the shack, itself appearing a thousand
 years old, shrunk to bare a shadow
 big enough to shield his wizened head.

Great noise from my little purse &
 herself madly click-click & noise-noising
 to be freed, leapt to the desert floor
 & up to the little old man, cackles
 filled the warming breeze as they
 seemed to contest who merrier to see
 the other. Suddenly done, she returned
 to me & little purse most agreeably.

Iris then gnattered awhile with him,
 maybe getting directions. His eyes like
 black cosmic holes in his head but
 his speech delighted. Did he guard
 an invisible domain where Wytner lay?
 I looked at Cordel'a but she was calm,
 even patient, not by reputation.

Iris & the little man kissed cheeks
 side to side three times, then he too
 seemed to forget us as he resumed
 his stool, his cosmic-eyed ruming
 of . . . something.

Iris continued us at a quicker pace,
 I couldn't tell why, unless the town
 set at dark & none to find. We simply
 hurried urgently. I wanted to talk,
 to hear their voices, to be a little
 reassured by these, but my mouth
 was parched, tongue unable. They too found
 nothing to say.

Finally we approached a strange
 building, then several, seeming
 beyond this desert we had traveled.
 Now there was a road before us,
 trees again, & many more in the
 distance. White Woods? Woods within
 Woods? I so wanted to know *anything*.

A great mass of a building, but not
 like those the King had shown me.
 It had no apparent main entrance,
 was more like a very tall hill
 of many windows & a few doors.
 Iris led us toward one, again saying
 nothing.

Suddenly in a very quiet room, lined
 on three sides with books. The fourth
 a fireplace. Several stools & one
 armchair its furniture. The latter turned
 away from us.

Our hands so tightly clasped till
 now fell from each other.
 He addressed me alone, in my mind,
 & I think he did with Cordel'a &
 Iris too. All at once, but separately.

"Odom."

"I knew you in that cave."

"In a way, yes."

"I've come, *we've come*, to ask your help.
 To save these White Woods."

"Save?"

"From men. The kind you showed me
 who burn & pollute & despoil this world."

I feel eyes upon me with no face,
 the voice ever deeper in my mind,
 ever sadder, ever angrier. I hold
 my own somehow. *This matters.*

"Men like that will keep coming &
 coming. They know only how to use &
 use, until all is gone, & then surprised
 the loss."

"But not all men are like that!
 We have come for your help!
 My King, my father, we love our
 world. *We cherish belonging to it.*"

Silence. "And yet you are defeated,
 & herded, & cowed by the destroyers."

I hold myself strong, still, eyes shut,
 maybe gone, maybe body gone.
 But I hold, *I must*.

“What would you give for this world
 you love, Odom? What sacrifice?”
 “I don’t know. What do I have?”
 “You love Iris. You love Cordel’a.”
 I nod, bodiless. “Yes.”

“Would you leave them one day
 coming, leave them maybe never to be
 reunited again? To join with others
 to help save the world?”

I am silent, let the long moment
 pass. Think of these two girls,
 how I love each specially, how I am
more by loving them, coming
 here, *trusting* them.

“Yes,” I say aloud. My eyes opened.
 Reaching down in either direction
 for a girl’s hand. My heart shivers
 & moans this recovered touch.

Their eyes still closed, their conversations
 still occurring, perhaps
 their sacrifices being gamed out.
 What would each give, for what?

I close my eyes again, to wait
 quietly, & feel a *hmmm* rise in
 my mind like no other I had
 known. Feels like many in one,
 like it’s stronger for this, like
 the despoilers of the world could
 not imagine, like their petty minds
 & machines could not, like *here*
 was something to comfort me
 sweet & deep in the sadness
 of my sacrifices to come.

lvi. Braided Hmmm, Part 2

I have loved before like I love Odom
 now, lived deeply among men & women before
 closely, as I do now. I have come
 & gone from many lives, like I am
 now, like I will again.

I see their beautiful faces struggle as
 they talk to him, negotiate, promise,
 sacrifice what little they have, &
 willing, always willing. Less willing
 is he to talk to me.

“Why don’t you help them? Really help them?”
 Silence.

“Speak plainly. You know how.”

“You can invade & burn every world
 in all creation & never settle in peace.”

“Teach us. *Teach me.*”

Silence.

“*Tell me.*”

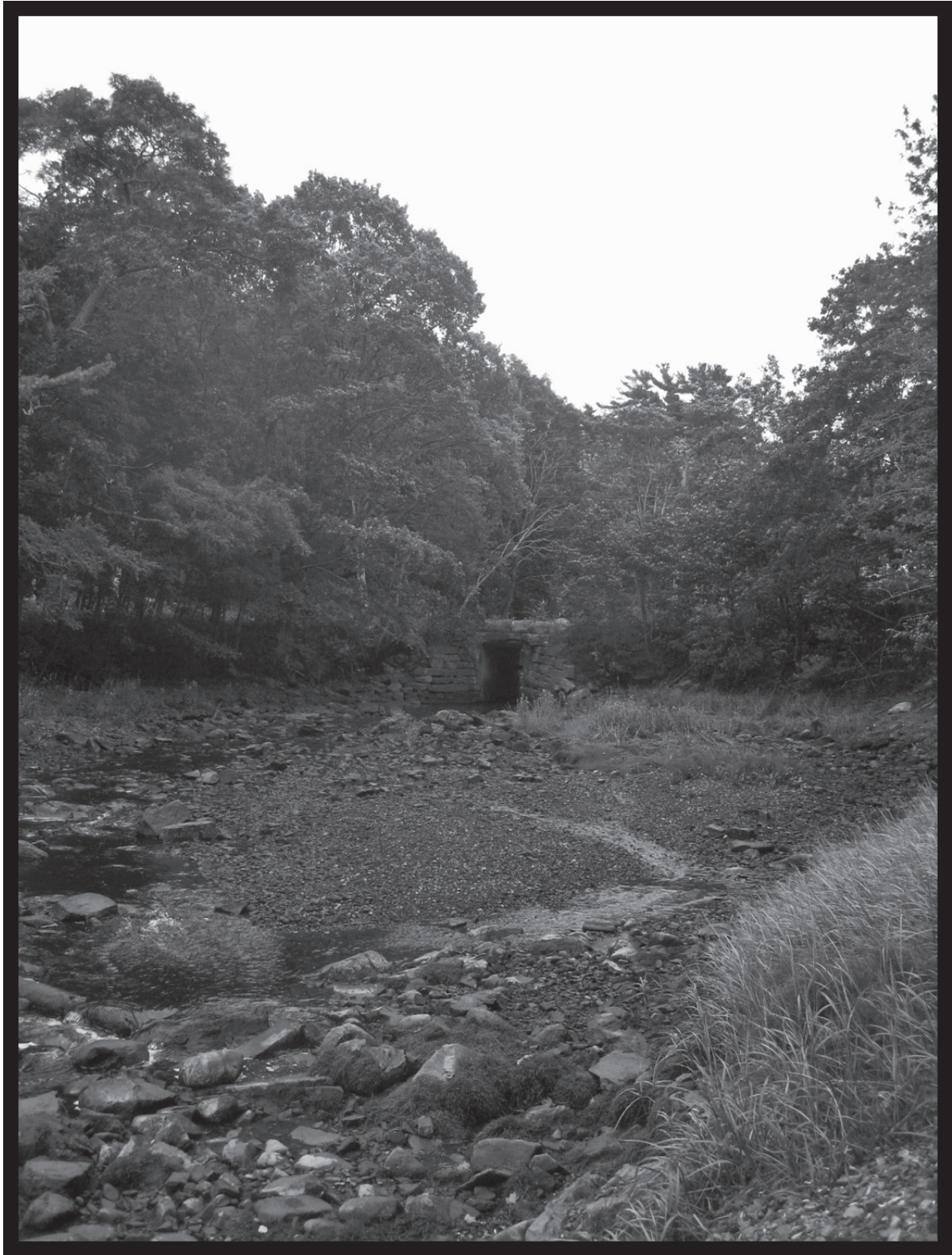
“Men don’t learn. They dream, & want,
 & hunger, create principles by which to
 burn other men, & the whole world, &
 worship these principles till the air
 & the water dead, & the last of them fallen.”

“You don’t love these two a little?”

“A little. It’s not enough.”

I try to show him, as often I have
 tried. How I led Odom that night
 along, till he spied me as I danced nude
 with the White Bunny. How he awed
 of my slender torso, long hair, wanted
 fierce & soft of me.

I show him Cordel’a, the afternoons
 we stole to hidden places by the water,
 found low stones to sit on, to face
 one another, & I made her take down
 her braids & show me her long beautiful
 hair, & made her remove all the
 layers shrouding her new figure.



She told me, fierce ocean blue eyes locked
desperately on mine, that she longed to kiss
me, not the boys who stared her.

“If we could turn their fears toward
nurture, toward music, toward dreams,
toward how the world would protect
them as much as all living on it, if only
they would open their fists, find their
yearning’s answers in every direction.”

Silence. Then: “You will choose, as you
always do. Why would this time be
different?”

I shake him off. Odom has taken both
our hands again, though Cordel’a
is still very deep in her commune. His hand
is very warm but his grasp of mine
is gentle. I feel my body yearn toward
his, as it’s always done toward one of them.

The more I want him, the more
the truths about me & the world recede,
the more I push them down,
the more I am the strange but
pretty girl he sees. So wish it was so.

Cordel’a wakes with a cry & a whimper
& grips us both hard to depart *now*,
uncaring why we came, or what we
feared, *go now, Iris, go now*.

They are both dazed enough to little notice
how quick our return. We don’t talk
of what we experienced, what use
it might be.

But I now know. *The White Woods will not burn.*
He was not scared. *He was angry.*

I lead them back to our treehouse
on the edge of the White Woods.
They are roused enough now to wonder
what we accomplished, *what now?*

What I do not say is, “I won’t be able
to save you all. But I love you two
enough to try.”

What I do instead is smile each of them
 enough to fog their hearts happy,
 & say, "We did well. He will protect
 the Woods, as always." They believe
 me enough, just enough.

We walk back into the encampment,
 night still. A word in Cordel's ear,
 "Distract your father of Odom's
 absence." Her look sharp, disappointed,
 but I nod, *do this for me*. She will.

Odom I lead away from the encampment
 now, his conversation in Wytner
 still distracting him, despairing him some.
 My hand grasping tighter his,
 we walk through the half-built town.

Lead him to the biggest building with
 its great spire. He hesitates but
 I insist him with fingers sharp
 in his palm, a strange, forceful
 smile. He comes.

I know the intent of this building,
 to bring life's suffering & mysteries
 into a well-lit communing, a sweet crooning
 of simple answers a child might wish,
 a promise that worn hands, aching
 torsos, rent hearts will gain reward
 by death, & so return to work *now*.

I find a candle & a match & light it,
 & lead him to the open area
 of the floor, & sit him while I gather
 together their trinkets & pages & icons
 of naïve human faith, & find a cache
 of soft lamb's wool meant for preachers'
 costumes, & bags of soft feathers meant
 for ceremonial tools, & I assemble
 around Odom a bed for our coupling.

He is so gentle in our kissing I know
 he is more scared than heated, &
 so I press his fingers to my breast,
 my already hard nipples. I reach
 under his clothes for his boy's cock
 & knead it into manhood, & his
 kiss comes more hungry, & he knows
 not how to take me, but that he
 wants to, & I guide him, & I let him,
 & I submit to him as I have to so many
 these countless centuries among men,
 on this world & many, many others.

The one in Wytner would grimace at
 my happy moaning cries, at how
 I let my body burn & blow with
 my new lover's touch, at how I *make*
him burn & blow in return.

The one in Wytner has long not
 put on a man's skin & bones & want
 & fears of why & death. The one
 in Wytner has loved but not in a
 long time.

We leave before light, the worship house
 & its trinkets stained & scattered
 with our loving hours, its scents
 & sweats. My message to Odom's
 tribe's captors: *there are stranger*
strengths bide this world, & will crush
you easily. 'Ware those White Woods.

His smile sugary & easeful now,
 his trust in whatever I am complete,
 his faith that beauty can be his,
can want him, *can* love him,
 he is marked down deep by me now—

& as we walk along, I teach him a new way to *hmmm*,
 to be one, none, many with all, he seems to know it,
 smiles & knows—

& when I go, or he does, he will survive,
 he will love others like we loved,
 he will lead men toward courage
 & hope, toward the music of our
 moans & cries in this night,
 toward everything good in this world,
 that he may ever new remember me.

lvii. Braided Hmmm, Part 3

I hear voices, not Odom's, not Iris's,
hmmming, but a strange new way,
 not summing to just one, but none & many
 too, they dim when I try to peek,
 stronger when my eyes close again, stronger
 still when I calm my breath & relax.

Now one voice, tastes like dirt in my mind,
 like leaves & berries, soft like the fur
 of every stray cat I've tried to keep, slippery
 like the fish shiny & flopping in the big
 nets. A voice I've known in dreams,
 like I was expecting. He begins.

"How do you steer a boat on God's own sea?"
 "You take the oar & you beat at the boards
 below your feet—"
 "Beat at them & scream & beat at them
 some more until you sink—"
 "And you drown—"
 "And so you give your reply—"
 "Your sea, your boat—"
 "My will, my death."

We speak these words back & forth like
 we so often have, they are our
 signal, how we grab & keep hold in dreams.

I open my eyes now. He smiles. He isn't simply
 a man & so his smile is always off.
 I've tried to teach him. He fails.

"Are we still in the room with Iris & Odom?"

"Yes, & no."

"This isn't one of our usual dreams?"

"No, Cordel'a."

"No strange books for us to read together?

No trees we talk to? No ghosts?"

"No, Cordel'a."

He stands, & motions me to sit in his chair.
Manners he does well. I wish I could see
the others too right now.

He is tall, his face more shadows than
flesh & bones. Taller than Odom, or my
own tall father. Dressed in skins, rags,
more shadows? Walks bent, like in pain,
or old, but is neither. Ancient but not
merely old like a man.

I close my eyes in this already dream,
to pause it, to remember. He came
to me in my dreams from very young,
it was why Odom thinks me a
light sleeper. I was scared. Scared of
the strange music of my dreams,
the music of the hearts of all those
I knew, of the world, of many worlds.

But I saw how brave were those around me,
defending us in the tribal wars, risking
every day going out in the long boats
fishing, risking their safety for
those they loved. This courage
changed my dreams, I dared to know
better this music, dared what resided
in my dreams to appear plainly.

And he did. Never a fully fleshed man,
but this form showed me he
acknowledged what I was, cared somehow.

But he hadn't come for me, because
of me. It was Odom. I learned this
very slowly, as I learned to know
his mind, as he had learned mine.

Why? For what? We would sit together
deep in the One Woods, quietly
listening, & I would try to understand.

The air cool, a little damp, little stirring,
 sometimes I felt like I was half buried
 in autumn leaves, covered in fur, & again
 my question. Trees about us listening,
 almost willing to help, especially the young ones.

“Will you take him from me?”

“Take?”

“Odom? *Tell me.*”

“How would anything in the world do that?”

When Iris came to our tribe, he was
 as curious, as restless of her. He took me
 to a place deep in the One Woods, an old house,
 abandoned of its inhabitants, took me
 there to show me an old old book,
 & the pictures in it of a girl, a princess
 beautiful & powerful. *She was Iris.*

I open my eyes to now. He is before me,
 as fully as ever, more so. Asking him
 is hopeless, yet I do again.

“Will you take him from me?”

“He must choose.”

“Choose what?”

“Choose his life among his loved ones, or
 to save this world.”

“Why? Why him?”

“Him & others.”

“*Why?* What’s wrong with this world that
 he must leave us & save it?”

Silence.

“Tell me. Do you love me?”

Silence.

“*Tell me.*”

“It’s not enough.”

I want to say to him, & then I want to go.
 I think of how much I love Odom & Iris,
 & the way we live, my father, the fishers,
 these magickal Woods by daylight hours
 & by dreams. I try to say it in words
 this not-just-human Beast will hear fully,
 will feel like my heart’s claws in
 whatever flesh he has.

"I have to believe the world is good.
I have to."

He briefly shows me something like days
 to come. Violence, abstract, absurd,
 & few of us escaping, with nothing in
 our hands, just deep into these Woods
 in a wild night of fire.

And Odom isn't with us. He has gone far,
 he is traveling, heart rent, with others,
 a group of men. They grow to love him,
 as I do. *They have to save the world.*

Than it's gone, & he's gone, but he leaves
 me a smile, sad but true. I am back
 with Iris & Odom, feeling like I haven't
 breathed in minutes. Looking at Iris.
Go now, Iris, go now.

I feel him parting me already, even
 before Iris takes him away from the
 encampment into the night. I know
 better than Odom her intent. She knows
 he's going too. She wants to hold him
 so he won't forget her when the world
 takes him from her, & me.

Take? How would anything in the world
 do that?

lviii. Stone Tower

More rain. Thunder & lightning. I lay
 low under my brown blanket, on my matt,
 holding my blue-green little purse close.
 Try to sort feelings even as they
 tangle too badly to know.

How can I sacrifice all I know & love now?
 How can I leave Iris? Or Cordel'a? Or my father?
 Why do I feel helpless when good as well as
 bad powers range near me?

A noise at the entrance to our tent &
 our father comes in. Wet, but smiles
 at me loving. I expect he's forgotten
 a tool or his rain hat or such, but
 he sits down on the edge of my matt.

"How are you, Odom?"
 "I'm good, Father. And you?"
 He smiles deeper, shakes his head.
 "How *are* you? Tell me true, son."

Does he know about Iris? He doesn't
 seem angry. I decide to deflect, but
 honestly.

"I've heard the new king dislikes our Woods."
 "Dislikes how?"
 "He studies to destroy the magic within."
 His face reveals nothing.
 I try again.
 "Those Woods are very important to us."
 He nods.

I look at him plainly, lean forward to
 hold one of his large sea-worn hands.
 "Tell me."
 "May I show you?"
 We cloak & venture into the pour, less
 now than before. Climb the wet,
 somewhat muddy hills to the White Woods.

More protected from rain once we enter.
 He leads me longer, & I can hear
 the low *hmmm* he sings.

Deep deep into the White Woods we go,
 till it feels like this has ever been
 our travel, & ever on. I don't tire but
 I do wonder. He says nothing as we go.

We arrive suddenly. A clearing, with a
 massive tower in its center. Made of
 ridged granite, many small pieces fitted
 together. Tall as perhaps 20 men,
 four-sided, with a kind of round face near the top
 on each side. He counts 12 glowing dots
 in each circle, & two long curved pieces
 nailed loosely to its center, seeming
 to point at the dots & farther.

I step forward & touch the tower, cold,
rough, like real enough rock.
A glowing upon the tower from unseen source.

“What is this?”

“It’s a promise to us that men are no formidable
enemy to these Woods.”

“I don’t understand.”

He comes close to me, looks down to my face,
hands on my shoulders.

“*Tell me*,” I say.

He smiles. “This Tower is our promise.”

“How? I don’t understand.”

“As is the girl Iris.”

Inwardly I flinch but otherwise hold
my own.

“But you know all this.”

“I didn’t know about this Tower.”

He suddenly lowers his tall muscular self
to the grass next to the Tower. Motions
me to set next to him.

“Do you know why we are fishers, Odom?”

I shake my head.

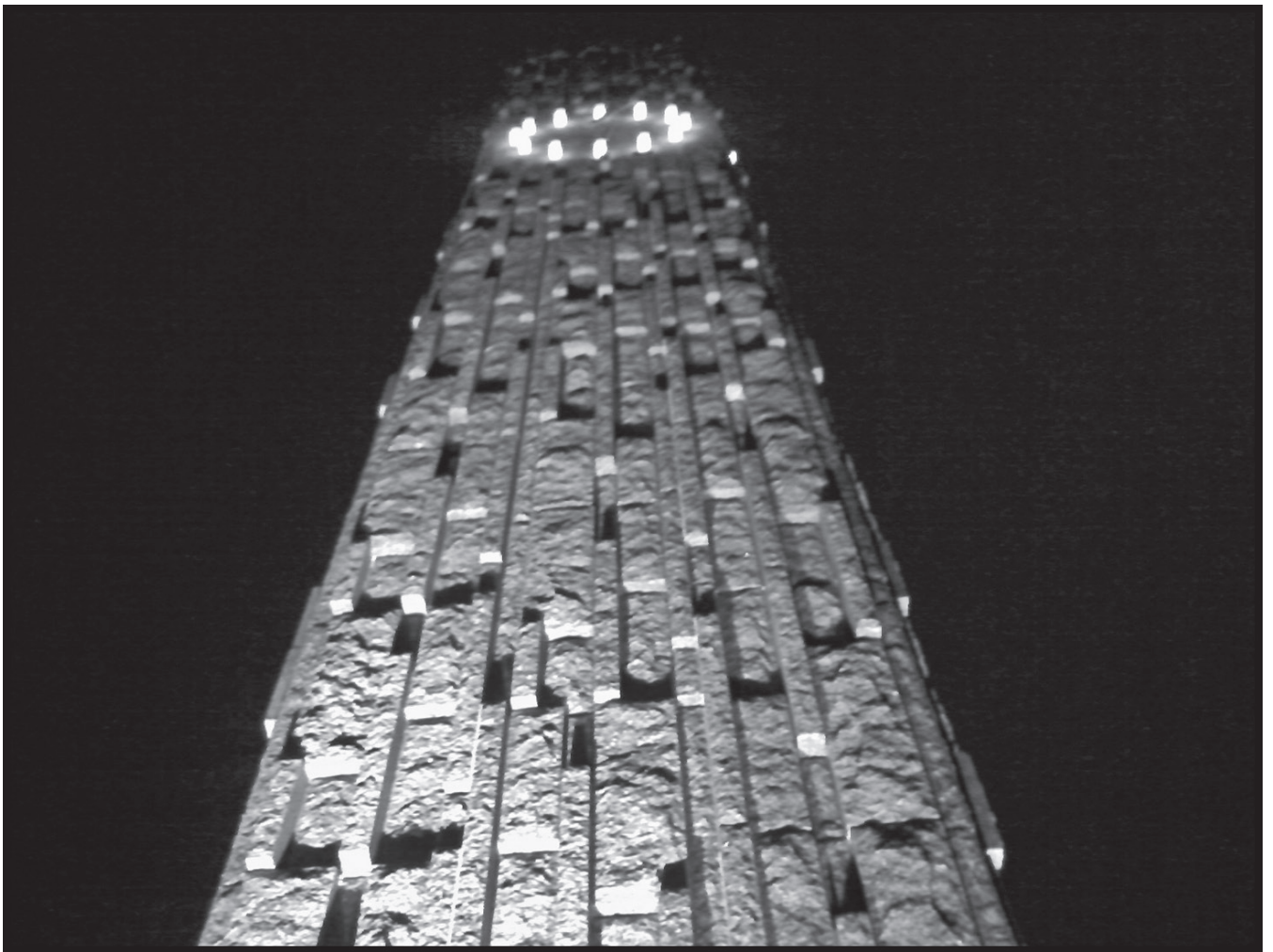
“Or why we have not ourselves built more
permanent homes?”

Shake again.

“We are Travelers. Even now, we could
leave where we are in a night or less.”

“Why don’t we? Better than calling another
tribe’s king our own!” I suddenly shout,
surprising both of us.

He nods. “We’ve settled where we did to be
near these White Woods. Long ago,
the King & I strayed into them
by accident, & might have perished
before finding our way back.”



"What happened?"

"The Creatures found us, & led us to the cave of a powerful being."

"A Beast?"

He nods.

"He doesn't like men."

"No. And he might have driven us out or worse but the Creatures stood by us.

A White Bunny. A little gnattering thing.

Some bears, giraffes, others."

"Why?"

He shakes his head. "I don't know. But that was how we came to live near here, to settle as much as we have."

"Do they know the dangers? Do they understand what some men will do?"

I don't feel reassured. Trying not to just panic. *I don't want to leave him, or Iris, or Cordel'a.*

He stands, & pulls me up too. He makes us lean close to the stone Tower, feel it, *listen*. I close my eyes, & feel how strong is the vibration now, the *Hmmm*. Open my eyes & see his are still closed, but his smile is beautiful. *He believes as I did.*

He speaks softly again. "Take care of Iris, son. We found her in these Woods some years ago. She was wandering barefoot, singing to herself & all those around. Another gift of these Woods, & a promise."

I nod mutely & he seems satisfied. He leads us back as we came, his *Hmmm* one of joy. He has told me all & we now share these secrets.

I wonder if I should leave soon. Do what I must with whoever else. I am here & gone both, unable to say this, knowing that all I love is *not* safe, & the danger is nearer all the time. I think of Iris's sweet deep kiss, & paralyze.

"Come on, Odom!" my father calls, & I hurry.

lix. Odom & Roddy

“Have you come to kill me too then?”
I’m too weak & despairing to hide anymore.
Better quick & done.

He nods to me come out. Older than me,
doesn’t look like a murderer. Speaks:
“Put down your hands, son. Tell me who
you are.”

I’d been crouched hiding under the
half-built stairs of the church.
He sits down on them & motions me too.

“My name is Odom.”
“I’m Roddy. Is this your village?”
“No!” I say fiercely. “I lived beyond
those brown hills, an encampment
near the sea. When our tribe was
taken over by another one, they intended
us to live here.”

Roddy looks around. “How are you
the only one left, Odom?”

Odom’s face shivers near tears. “I was
in the Woods, preparing to leave.”
“Leave? Why?”
“I was told I have to find others to help
save the world.” Odom expects Roddy
will laugh or mock. Roddy doesn’t.

“We share much in common. I’ve been
living in another part of those same Woods
for a long time. And I share your mission.”

“How?”
“What happened to everyone?” Roddy asks
instead.
“I don’t know.”
Roddy nods & stands. Offers his hand.
Odom doesn’t move yet. “Will you help
me find them?”
Roddy nods. “If we can. But they may
not be findable.”
“Why?”

Roddy sits back down. "Were you really
preparing to leave?"
Odom shivers again. "No," he whispers.
"Why?"
"Iris," he whispers.
Roddy flinches. "She is yours?"
Odom nods.
Roddy offers his hand again. Odom takes it.

They search the village meticulously.
As empty of people as a half-built stage
set would be.

Then Odom leads Roddy to his tribe's encampment,
& again no people, no bloodshed, no boats
taken. Odom likes this strange man & tries to be
strong as they hunt fruitlessly. But his panic
undoes him as he sits down on the matt
in his family's tent.

"Odom, I think they are safe."
"How? Where?"
"I don't know either. Just that I too had to
give up everything & leave."
"Why us?"

Roddy sits on Odom's matt with him.
"I think it's because we have to save
the *whole* world, not just the part
we each love."
Odom nods because nothing else
makes sense.

They stay a couple of days more,
just to be sure nothing happens,
nobody returns. They don't. Roddy is patient.
He likes the young man. Odom wants
to go back into the White Woods
to find out more. Roddy desists, says
he will pack them each a long distance
set of gear.

Odom climbs up the brown hills to the
White Woods, & takes out his blue-green
little purse. Herself walks onto his palm,
a friendly gnaw or two.

“Bring me to him.”

“Eh?”

Odom stares her down unsmiling. “I need to know they are safe.”

Suddenly she cackles & races off among the trees, tugging at his mind to follow, *follow!* He runs as fast as he can, holding close to her cacklings & *hmmings*.

They arrive in seeming minutes, her already inside. It takes more than all his courage to enter the dark, dark cave.

“I’m here again.”

“Why?”

“You took everyone! Why?”

“There was no choice.”

“What did you do with them?”

“They’re safe. You knew that.”

“What is wrong with the world? Explain it to me.”

“Men.”

“*I am a man! Roddy is a man!* How can we do this then? Save the world from ourselves?”

“There will be others.”

“More men?”

“Yes. But not just.”

“My father believed we were all safe.”

“They are. For now.”

Silence.

“Is this your choice? Did you do this?”

“Not as you think.”

“What are we supposed to do? How do we save the world? Where do we go?”

“Just walk, Odom. The others will find you.”

He wants to say *something*, to express
his fear, anger, terror, sadness.

“She will find you again.”

“Who?”

“All of them.”

Finally he says: “I just wish I understood.”

“Nobody understands, Odom. The world
is not fully knowable. Now go back to Roddy.
It’s time you started.”

Odom leaves the cave, sad, but no longer
afraid. He finds Roddy ready to leave.
They walk, wordless, side by side,
away from the encampment.

lx. The Bridge [for R. Carson]

*“What we feel is what we do.
What we feel is, nearly, what we are.”*

My back began to ache one morning, not long
after we returned from the Cave of the Beast.
A low ache, wrenching, seeming near malevolent.
Came & went as I sat, stood, walked.
Caused my dreams dash together & crumple,
drag me awake to whimper in the tent’s
darkness. *I was delaying.*

More of us were pulled from our boats
to work on our new home. Our fishing
lives somehow treated like past tense.
How else were we to make our living,
provide our meals?

It was more. These conquerors, as I’d begun
to call them in my mind, did not
cherish the natural world, as the King
had warned me. All over the half-built
town were wasted materials, piles of wood
let to molder & rot. *I was delaying.*

Others thought as I did. Though still a boy
 in years, & despite my cruel back, I worked
 as hard as any of the men, in the boats
 & in the town. Worked hard, & listened.
 They were discontent, yet not organized,
 'twas no more.

My father & our King worked among them,
 with cheer, no complaints.

“Can you talk to them? Tell them we’re fishers,
 our lives to the sea?”

“They know.”

“Then what about this town we waste weeks
 to build, my King?”

“I’m not your King. You know that. To them,
 I am another man. Not the strongest among
 us anymore, either.”

I was delaying. My back grew worse.
 My father made me rest much of the days,
 & Cordel’a would tend me.

“Where is Iris?”

“Odom, you’re too feeble for her kisses,”
 ocean blue eyes mocking me, trying to rouse
 up our old rows.

“She’s in the White Woods.”

I sit up, screeching my back.

“Where?”

She pushes me firmly back on my matt.
 With a sudden smirk, she reaches under
 my matt & pulls out my blue-green little purse.

Gestures me open my hand. Pours her little self
 onto my palm. Big eyes, pleased as ever just to be.

“Ask her, Odom.”

I say nothing, just stare.

“Go on.”

I look at the tiny Creature & say, “Where
 is Iris?”

“Eh?” she caws, lazily.

I hold her up closer to me. “*Where is she?*”

She cackles softly, no more.

Frustrated, I place her back
 in the purse. She gnatters agreeably.

Roddy pokes the fire between us a little higher. "You were delaying."

I nod.

"So why did you go to the Beast to say you weren't going?"

"I heard talk that the new king was planning to assault the White Woods. Burn it to the ground. And our encampment too. Move us forcibly into the town."

"But why?"

"It's simple. He would extract from the White Woods its strange magicks & then use them & our tribe's men as part of an army. The Peace-Keeper's treaty had united a great population under one king. But he wanted more."

"So you went to the Beast & told him you couldn't leave?"

"Our King & my father had finally had enough. We would simply leave. Bring little, pack our boats, go."

"What of the White Woods?"

I laugh. "I asked him. My King smiled at me like I had never seen, a sort of sweet wonder in his eyes. 'Odom, *the White Woods don't burn.*'"

"So you were leaving with them?"

"Yes."

"And you went to see the Beast?"

"I pulled her out of my little purse & begged her to bring me. She would cackle & gnatter & gnaw my palm, but nothing."

Roddy nods.

"Finally, she did lead me into the White Woods. To the Tower my father had shown me."

"The Woods' promise of your tribe's safety."

"Yes."

"And his message to you to do as you'd agreed."

"Save the world, not just who I love."

Nod.

"And Iris?"

I shake my head.

Roddy stares at the fire a long time.

I wonder his story even as he stands
to put out the fire, to sleep.

We travel open roads for a long time,
to no apparent end. Villages where life
is stable, dull, safe. We sometimes hear talk of
a distant war, wonder if the Peace-Keeper's
king had gone forth without White Woods
magicks, or my own tribe's men.

At night I often hold my blue-green little purse
in my hand, not studying its designs,
nor inviting its contents, her, out.
I feel far from the delights of Creatures,
the love of my kin. Iris's turquoise eyes.

Roddy can tell my quiet despair as we
trudge along, saving the world one reluctant
step after the next.

He stops us by a pretty grove of trees
along yet another otherwise empty road.
Not yet night yet he halts us, & sets about
gathering fire kindling. I sit, waiting,
willing to cook our stew as shared task.

But he pulls out a teapot, battered silver
thing. Queer smile at me, fetches water
from a nearby stream. Sets it to boiling.

"Do you like tea, Odom?"

"Never drank it much."

"Have you had mushroom tea before?"

I shake my head but, strangely, hear
her cackle in my mind.

Bitter, bitter taste. But Roddy nods me on,
strange smile, & I drink again.
Nothing to it special, but I keep sipping as the
sun's burnt orange light rims the distant
trees I'd not noticed.

I begin to smile, not knowing why. My near-
constant backache feels gone, quite gone.

"Show me your little purse, Odom?"

This seems like a good idea, a really good one, so I pull it out from my traveling pack. I sit next to Roddy, as I hadn't previously, & show him up close. The Island, the Castle. The Tangled Gate. He nods, not unknowing these, though I don't ask how.

"Would you like to see the contents?"

He nods. His smile glowing as mine. One by one, I take out the coins, the dice, the connecting tool. All seem more kinetic to mine eye than usual.

I place the coin purse in my hand for her to come out. After a time, she does, ambling, curious to see where in this delightful world she is.

Roddy & she stare at each other with equal delight.

"You know about her . . . about Creatures?"

He nods, almost sadly.

"You knew them in the White Woods?"

Nods.

"And you had to leave them like I did?"

"And I had to leave my brothers before that, as you have left your kin."

The fire is now our light but our faces are shining to each other.

"We can't return to what we knew of them, but we have to return?"

"Yes, Odom."

"And I think she will show us?"

"I think so too."

"Tonight? Now?"

He laughs. We have our fires doused & packs ready in minutes. Herself waits agreeably, cackling softly.

A full moon has come up now & reveals that our little grove of trees is indeed within distance of woods.

"White Woods?"

"Ask her."

Roddy kneels his tall, muscular self down as low as he can to address my, our, friend.

"We're ready to find our brothers.
Will you bring us?"

Cackling wild with delight, she speeds
away toward the White Woods.
Laughing, shouting, we follow, running
flat out & only keeping up by
the cackles she fills our minds with.

No paths. No signs of men. But we
continue to run along, minutes or hours
pass, the moon seeming unmoved high
above us.

Then, suddenly, a clearing, & *oh my!*
In its center, a White Birch, its three trunks
twined close. Glowing in the moonlight,
glowing in our eyes. But nobody around.

To take a breath before the chase
resumes, we sit beneath her
branches. Looking up at the full moon.

Roddy begins to count. "Six," he whispers.
"Six what?"
"Six leaves. Look!"

I look at the leaves, each shining distinctly
on its branch. Look closer & closer to each.

One a tall, thin man, seated at a table in
a courtyard, studying the carvings of
his walking stick.
One a pretty girl, brushing her long hair,
quietly singing, again & again, "all flesh
is lorn, all flesh needs love."
One a dark man, strange hat on his head,
standing before a canvas, tis a painting
of a White Birch, *this White Birch*.
One is Roddy, shows him wandering
another part of these White Woods,
living in various strange little houses.
One shows me, standing with Iris &
Cordel'a, talking to the Beast, each
making an arrangement.
The last is a man, crouching by a stream,
above him a great bridge crossing
the water. He looks at me, at Roddy,
kindly, but waiting. *He's waiting us.*

*My little friend bursts out with
 more wild cackles, leading us,
 but also calling, calling, calling,
 to all the wondrous Creatures of
 the Woods, Creatures of the Dream,
 & as we resume our run, we can
 see flashing among the trees nearby
 the White Bunny, grey hedgehog,
 many giraffes, many bears, bloo-eyed
 Kittees, purple furry Creature with
 ribbons & bow, shiny-eyed Creatures, &
 many others, running, running,
 running, & we somehow keeping up, &
 along the way one joins us, the tall
 thin man, & then the running girl too,
 & the dark man, with canvases
 strapped to his back, & we are running
 in a happy, shouting group, &
 when the thorns & bushes get thick, thicker,
 we push through, laugh, shout, push through,
 & tis of a wondrous sudden when we
 emerge from them along a stream,
 & there the bridge, & there, crouching,
 waiting, smiling, at last, & at last,
 the man we newly gathered brothers
 will alone now kneel to call our King.*

 12/24/2015
 4

* * * * *





Ambrose Bierce

An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge

or, A Dead Man's Dream

[Classic Fiction]

Originally published in Tales of Soldiers and Civilians, 1891.

A man stood upon a railroad bridge in northern Alabama, looking down into the swift water twenty feet below. The man's hands were behind his back, the wrists bound with a cord. A rope closely encircled his neck. It was attached to a stout cross-timber above his head and the slack fell to the level of his knees. Some loose boards laid upon the sleepers supporting the metals of the railway supplied a footing for him and his executioners—two private soldiers of the Federal army, directed by a sergeant who in civil life may have been a deputy sheriff. At a short remove upon the same temporary platform was an officer in the uniform of his rank, armed. He was a captain. A sentinel at each end of the bridge stood with his rifle in the position known as “support,” that is to say, vertical in front of the left shoulder, the hammer resting on the forearm thrown straight across the chest—a formal and unnatural position, enforcing an erect carriage of the body. It did not appear to be the duty of these two men to know what was occurring at the center of the bridge; they merely blockaded the two ends of the foot planking that traversed it.

Beyond one of the sentinels nobody was in sight; the railroad ran straight away into a forest for a hundred yards, then, curving, was lost to view. Doubtless there was an outpost farther along. The other bank of the stream was open ground—a gentle acclivity topped with a stockade of vertical tree trunks, loopholed for rifles, with a single embrasure through which protruded the muzzle of a brass cannon commanding the bridge. Midway of the slope between the bridge and fort were the spectators—a single company of infantry in line, at “parade rest,” the butts of the rifles on the ground, the barrels inclining slightly backward against the right shoulder, the hands crossed upon the stock. A lieutenant stood at the right of the line, the point of his sword upon the ground, his left hand resting upon his right. Excepting the group of four at the center of the bridge, not a man moved. The company faced the bridge, staring stonily, motionless. The sentinels, facing the banks of the stream, might have been statues to adorn the bridge. The captain stood with folded arms, silent, observing the work of his subordinates, but making no sign. Death is a dignitary who when he comes announced is to be received with formal manifestations of respect, even by those most familiar with him. In the code of military etiquette silence and fixity are forms of deference.

The man who was engaged in being hanged was apparently about thirty-five years of age. He was a civilian, if one might judge from his habit, which was that of a planter. His features were good—a straight nose, firm mouth, broad forehead, from which his long, dark hair was combed straight back, falling behind his ears to the collar of his well-fitting frock coat. He wore a mustache and pointed beard, but no whiskers; his eyes were large and dark gray, and had a kindly expression which one would hardly have expected in one whose neck was in the hemp. Evidently this was no vulgar assassin. The liberal military code makes provision for hanging many kinds of persons, and gentlemen are not excluded.

The preparations being complete, the two private soldiers stepped aside and each drew away the plank upon which he had been standing. The sergeant turned to the captain, saluted and placed himself immediately behind that officer, who in turn moved apart one pace. These movements left the condemned man and the sergeant standing on the two ends of the same plank, which spanned three of the cross-ties of the bridge. The end upon which the civilian stood almost, but not quite, reached a fourth. This plank had been held in place by the weight of the captain; it was now held by that of the sergeant. At a signal from the former the latter would step aside, the plank would tilt and the condemned man go down between two ties. The arrangement commended itself to his judgment as simple and effective. His face had not been covered nor his eyes bandaged. He looked a moment at his “unsteadfast footing,” then let his gaze wander to the swirling water of the stream racing madly

beneath his feet. A piece of dancing driftwood caught his attention and his eyes followed it down the current. How slowly it appeared to move. What a sluggish stream!

He closed his eyes in order to fix his last thoughts upon his wife and children. The water, touched to gold by the early sun, the brooding mists under the banks at some distance down the stream, the fort, the soldiers, the piece of drift—all had distracted him. And now he became conscious of a new disturbance. Striking through the thought of his dear ones was a sound which he could neither ignore nor understand, a sharp, distinct, metallic percussion like the stroke of a blacksmith's hammer upon the anvil; it had the same ringing quality. He wondered what it was, and whether immeasurably distant or nearby—it seemed both. Its recurrence was regular, but as slow as the tolling of a death knell. He awaited each stroke with impatience and—he knew not why—apprehension. The intervals of silence grew progressively longer, the delays became maddening. With their greater infrequency the sounds increased in strength and sharpness. They hurt his ear like the thrust of a knife; he feared he would shriek. What he heard was the ticking of his watch.

He unclosed his eyes and saw again the water below him. "If I could free my hands," he thought, "I might throw off the noose and spring into the stream. By diving I could evade the bullets and, swimming vigorously, reach the bank, take to the woods and get away home. My home, thank God, is as yet outside their lines; my wife and little ones are still beyond the invader's farthest advance."

As these thoughts, which have here to be set down in words, were flashed into the doomed man's brain rather than evolved from it the captain nodded to the sergeant. The sergeant stepped aside.

II

Peyton Farquhar was a well-to-do planter, of an old and highly respected Alabama family. Being a slave owner and like other slave owners a politician he was naturally an original secessionist and ardently devoted to the Southern cause. Circumstances of an imperious nature, which it is unnecessary to relate here, had prevented him from taking service with the gallant army that had fought the disastrous campaigns ending with the fall of Corinth, and he chafed under the inglorious restraint, longing for the release of his energies, the larger life of the soldier, the opportunity for distinction. That opportunity, he felt, would come, as it comes to all in war time. Meanwhile he did what he could. No service was too humble for him to perform in aid of the South, no adventure too perilous for him to undertake if consistent with the character of a civilian who was at heart a soldier, and who in good faith and without too much qualification assented to at least a part of the frankly villainous dictum that all is fair in love and war.

One evening while Farquhar and his wife were sitting on a rustic bench near the entrance to his grounds, a gray-clad soldier rode up to the gate and asked for a drink of water. Mrs. Farquhar was only too happy to serve him with her own white hands. While she was fetching the water her husband approached the dusty horseman and inquired eagerly for news from the front.

"The Yanks are repairing the railroads," said the man, "and are getting ready for another advance. They have reached the Owl Creek bridge, put it in order and built a stockade on the north bank. The commandant has issued an order, which is posted everywhere, declaring that any civilian caught interfering with the railroad, its bridges, tunnels or trains will be summarily hanged. I saw the order."

"How far is it to the Owl Creek bridge?" Farquhar asked.

"About thirty miles."

"Is there no force on this side the creek?"

"Only a picket post half a mile out, on the railroad, and a single sentinel at this end of the bridge."

"Suppose a man—a civilian and student of hanging—should elude the picket post and perhaps get the better of the sentinel," said Farquhar, smiling, "what could he accomplish?"

The soldier reflected. "I was there a month ago," he replied. "I observed that the flood of last winter had lodged a great quantity of driftwood against the wooden pier at this end of the bridge. It is now dry and would burn like tow."

The lady had now brought the water, which the soldier drank. He thanked her ceremoniously, bowed to her husband and rode away. An hour later, after nightfall, he repassed the plantation, going northward in the direction from which he had come. He was a Federal scout.

III

As Peyton Farquhar fell straight downward through the bridge he lost consciousness and was as one already dead. From this state he was awakened—ages later, it seemed to him—by the pain of a sharp pressure upon his throat, followed by a sense of suffocation. Keen, poignant agonies seemed to shoot from his neck downward through every fiber of his body and limbs. These pains appeared to flash along well-defined lines of ramification and to beat with an inconceivably rapid periodicity. They seemed like streams of pulsating fire heating him to an intolerable temperature. As to his head, he was conscious of nothing but a feeling of fullness—of congestion. These sensations were unaccompanied by thought. The intellectual part of his nature was already effaced; he had power only to feel, and feeling was torment. He was conscious of motion. Encompassed in a luminous cloud, of which he was now merely the fiery heart, without material substance, he swung through unthinkable arcs of oscillation, like a vast pendulum. Then all at once, with terrible suddenness, the light about him shot upward with the noise of a loud splash; a frightful roaring was in his ears, and all was cold and dark. The power of thought was restored; he knew that the rope had broken and he had fallen into the stream. There was no additional strangulation; the noose about his neck was already suffocating him and kept the water from his lungs. To die of hanging at the bottom of a river!—the idea seemed to him ludicrous. He opened his eyes in the darkness and saw above him a gleam of light, but how distant, how inaccessible! He was still sinking, for the light became fainter and fainter until it was a mere glimmer. Then it began to grow and brighten, and he knew that he was rising toward the surface—knew it with reluctance, for he was now very comfortable. “To be hanged and drowned,” he thought? “that is not so bad; but I do not wish to be shot. No; I will not be shot; that is not fair.”

He was not conscious of an effort, but a sharp pain in his wrist apprised him that he was trying to free his hands. He gave the struggle his attention, as an idler might observe the feat of a juggler, without interest in the outcome. What splendid effort!—what magnificent, what superhuman strength! Ah, that was a fine endeavor! Bravo! The cord fell away; his arms parted and floated upward, the hands dimly seen on each side in the growing light. He watched them with a new interest as first one and then the other pounced upon the noose at his neck. They tore it away and thrust it fiercely aside, its undulations resembling those of a water snake. “Put it back, put it back!” He thought he shouted these words to his hands, for the undoing of the noose had been succeeded by the direst pang that he had yet experienced. His neck ached horribly; his brain was on fire; his heart, which had been fluttering faintly, gave a great leap, trying to force itself out at his mouth. His whole body was racked and wrenched with an insupportable anguish! But his disobedient hands gave no heed to the command. They beat the water vigorously with quick, downward strokes, forcing him to the surface. He felt his head emerge; his eyes were blinded by the sunlight; his chest expanded convulsively, and with a supreme and crowning agony his lungs engulfed a great draught of air, which instantly he expelled in a shriek!

He was now in full possession of his physical senses. They were, indeed, preternaturally keen and alert. Something in the awful disturbance of his organic system had so exalted and refined them that they made record of things never before perceived. He felt the ripples upon his face and heard their separate sounds as they struck. He looked at the forest on the bank of the stream, saw the individual trees, the leaves and the veining of each leaf—saw the very insects upon them: the locusts, the brilliant-bodied flies, the grey spiders stretching their webs from twig to twig. He noted the prismatic colors in all the dewdrops upon a million blades of grass. The humming of the gnats that danced above the eddies of the stream, the beating of the dragon flies’ wings, the strokes of the water-spiders’ legs, like oars which had lifted their boat—all these made audible music. A fish slid along beneath his eyes and he heard the rush of its body parting the water.

He had come to the surface facing down the stream; in a moment the visible world seemed to wheel slowly round, himself the pivotal point, and he saw the bridge, the fort, the soldiers upon the bridge, the captain, the sergeant, the two privates, his executioners. They were in silhouette against the blue sky. They shouted and gesticulated, pointing at him. The captain had drawn his pistol, but did not fire; the others were unarmed. Their movements were grotesque and horrible, their forms gigantic.

Suddenly he heard a sharp report and something struck the water smartly within a few inches of his head, spattering his face with spray. He heard a second report, and saw one of the sentinels with his rifle at his shoulder, a light cloud of blue smoke rising from the muzzle. The man in the water saw the eye of the man on the bridge gazing into his own through the sights of the rifle. He observed that it was a grey eye and remembered having read that grey eyes were keenest, and that all famous marksmen had them. Nevertheless, this one had missed.

A counter-swirl had caught Farquhar and turned him half round; he was again looking into the forest

on the bank opposite the fort. The sound of a clear, high voice in a monotonous singsong now rang out behind him and came across the water with a distinctness that pierced and subdued all other sounds, even the beating of the ripples in his ears. Although no soldier, he had frequented camps enough to know the dread significance of that deliberate, drawling, aspirated chant; the lieutenant on shore was taking a part in the morning's work. How coldly and pitilessly—with what an even, calm intonation, presaging, and enforcing tranquility in the men—with what accurately measured intervals fell those cruel words:

“Attention, company! . . . Shoulder arms! . . . Ready! . . . Aim! . . . Fire!”

Farquhar dived—dived as deeply as he could. The water roared in his ears like the voice of Niagara, yet he heard the dulled thunder of the volley and, rising again toward the surface, met shining bits of metal, singularly flattened, oscillating slowly downward. Some of them touched him on the face and hands, then fell away, continuing their descent. One lodged between his collar and neck; it was uncomfortably warm and he snatched it out.

As he rose to the surface, gasping for breath, he saw that he had been a long time under water; he was perceptibly farther downstream nearer to safety. The soldiers had almost finished reloading; the metal ramrods flashed all at once in the sunshine as they were drawn from the barrels, turned in the air, and thrust into their sockets. The two sentinels fired again, independently and ineffectually.

The hunted man saw all this over his shoulder; he was now swimming vigorously with the current. His brain was as energetic as his arms and legs; he thought with the rapidity of lightning.

“The officer,” he reasoned, “will not make that martinet's error a second time. It is as easy to dodge a volley as a single shot. He has probably already given the command to fire at will. God help me, I cannot dodge them all!”

An appalling splash within two yards of him was followed by a loud, rushing sound, diminuendo, which seemed to travel back through the air to the fort and died in an explosion which stirred the very river to its depths!

A rising sheet of water curved over him, fell down upon him, blinded him, strangled him! The cannon had taken a hand in the game. As he shook his head free from the commotion of the smitten water he heard the deflected shot humming through the air ahead, and in an instant it was cracking and smashing the branches in the forest beyond.

“They will not do that again,” he thought; “the next time they will use a charge of grape. I must keep my eye upon the gun; the smoke will apprise me—the report arrives too late; it lags behind the missile. That is a good gun.”

Suddenly he felt himself whirled round and round—spinning like a top. The water, the banks, the forests, the now distant bridge, fort and men—all were commingled and blurred. Objects were represented by their colors only; circular horizontal streaks of color—that was all he saw. He had been caught in a vortex and was being whirled on with a velocity of advance and gyration that made him giddy and sick. In a few moments he was flung upon the gravel at the foot of the left bank of the stream—the southern bank—and behind a projecting point which concealed him from his enemies. The sudden arrest of his motion, the abrasion of one of his hands on the gravel, restored him, and he wept with delight. He dug his fingers into the sand, threw it over himself in handfuls and audibly blessed it. It looked like diamonds, rubies, emeralds; he could think of nothing beautiful which it did not resemble. The trees upon the bank were giant garden plants; he noted a definite order in their arrangement, inhaled the fragrance of their blooms. A strange, roseate light shone through the spaces among their trunks and the wind made in their branches the music of Æolian harps. He had no wish to perfect his escape—was content to remain in that enchanting spot until retaken.

A whiz and rattle of grapeshot among the branches high above his head roused him from his dream. The baffled cannoneer had fired him a random farewell. He sprang to his feet, rushed up the sloping bank, and plunged into the forest.

All that day he traveled, laying his course by the rounding sun. The forest seemed interminable; nowhere did he discover a break in it, not even a woodman's road. He had not known that he lived in so wild a region. There was something uncanny in the revelation.

By nightfall he was fatigued, footsore, famishing. The thought of his wife and children urged him on. At last he found a road which led him in what he knew to be the right direction. It was as wide and straight as a city street, yet it seemed untraveled. No fields bordered it, no dwelling anywhere. Not so much as the barking of a dog suggested human habitation. The black bodies of the trees formed a straight wall on both sides, terminating on the horizon in a point, like a diagram in a lesson in perspective. Overhead, as he looked up through this rift in the wood, shone great garden stars looking unfamiliar and grouped in strange constellations. He was sure they were

arranged in some order which had a secret and malign significance. The wood on either side was full of singular noises, among which—once, twice, and again—he distinctly heard whispers in an unknown tongue.

His neck was in pain and lifting his hand to it found it horribly swollen. He knew that it had a circle of black where the rope had bruised it. His eyes felt congested; he could no longer close them. His tongue was swollen with thirst; he relieved its fever by thrusting it forward from between his teeth into the cold air. How softly the turf had carpeted the untraveled avenue—he could no longer feel the roadway beneath his feet!

Doubtless, despite his suffering, he had fallen asleep while walking, for now he sees another scene—perhaps he has merely recovered from a delirium. He stands at the gate of his own home. All is as he left it, and all bright and beautiful in the morning sunshine. He must have traveled the entire night. As he pushes open the gate and passes up the wide white walk, he sees a flutter of female garments; his wife, looking fresh and cool and sweet, steps down from the veranda to meet him. At the bottom of the steps she stands waiting, with a smile of ineffable joy, an attitude of matchless grace and dignity. Ah, how beautiful she is! He springs forward with extended arms. As he is about to clasp her he feels a stunning blow upon the back of the neck; a blinding white light blazes all about him with a sound like the shock of a cannon—then all is darkness and silence!

Peyton Farquhar was dead; his body, with a broken neck, swung gently from side to side beneath the timbers of the Owl Creek bridge.

* * * * *





Tom Sheehan

A Bottle Descending

Amber and empty, bottle on this table
 escapes with evening, economy of light,
 hardly daring itself, fragile to a lime
 precedent, assumes a remnant name.

Sundown seeks initiatives and separates
 elements, a slow folding away takes place,
 as if I were in two rooms. Perhaps rainbow
 in my eye is one I stole from it.

When sundown leaves its core of glass,
 when it sneaks off on soft paws, playful
 yet enterprising, pulling pink and purple
 with it, a prisoner slipping between bars,

over walls, I hold to some of it, here,
 where word of it sits parsed of glass,
 a pastel verb sitting still, not breathing,
 a fragment of star's silver breath fallen

to my table entering night. And night accepts
 the bottle, wraps it in like a mother takes
 her child to arms. Darkness comes still,
 pink but a memory, purple cut as well,

and flattens to nothing, to a shapeless idea.
 Arc light that flamed on curve of glass,
 red of everything of day, leaves nothing,
 no horizon at all, bare memory minimum,

rare scar across the retina.

* * *

Final Acts

In the woodpile
I can't see, a snake
settles where my hand
left a moment's warmth
on a slanting of birch
plunging past white,

its coils
wound tight as bark.
Field mouse, beneath
owl's infrared eyes
and sudden wing thump,
gathers into last minutes.

* * * * *





Todd Brendan Fahey

Interview with Dr. Timothy Leary

Full interview available at:

http://www.fargonebooks.com/Dr_Leary.html.

Salt Lake City, Utah, September 28, 1992

Fahey: Who do you see as the most important neuronauts of the last 50 years?

Dr. Leary: What do you mean by the word “neuronauts”?

Fahey: Well, people who have been involved in the consciousness-expanding frontier in the last 50 years.

Dr. Leary: Oh, that’s a *good* question. The 20th century has been, historically, the century in which the basic philosophic and scientific principles which run the universe—which is quantum physics—have been popularized, humanized, disseminated, domesticated, so that people can learn how to communicate with their brains, and not just with status symbols.

And learn how to operate their brains. All this comes directly from the principles of Einstein and Heisenberg, who said, “the observer creates the universe that he or she interacts with.” So I say the great neuronauts would be Einstein and Heisenberg and Bohr, and people like that—the people that have applied brain-change techniques.

You start with, of course, the modern artists, the surrealists who totally destroyed reality. It’s the neurological task of our species to somehow be able to get out of your left brain, out of your mind, precisely, under control, and access the rest of your brain; and then, of course, to be able to go right back to your left brain any time you want to. So, the modern artists did this; they were able to put incredible hallucinations on canvas and still operate very successfully.

The literature of the 20th century that I prize has been totally right brain, that is, fuzzing up literate grammar. Of course we’ll start with James Joyce, and then with William Burroughs and Brion Gyson, who cut the word line and destroyed grammar. I would include people like Thomas Pynchon and William Gibson in the current generation.

Certainly, music of the 20th century *is* quantum physics, emphasizing innovation and improvisation. And, of course, jazz. And rock music—definitely out to destroy left-brain mind focus, and to expand consciousness.

The philosophy of the 20th century—again, its language, linguistic—is based upon quantum physics. The psychology of the 20th century, starting in the 1960s, is, again, designed to activate brains and to allow us to operate our brain, both the left brain and the right brain.

That covers it: we have science, linguistics, philosophy, art, music, literature [*laughs*].

Fahey: To what extent do the psychedelics factor into this equation?

Dr. Leary: [*Laughs*] Well, of course, one thing I omitted in my litany of brain-changing techniques is the use of drugs, which became popularized in the sixties, but they trace back to the early 20th century. It’s the socialization and popularization of the notion that you can change your brain, change your mind, change your mood, boot up, turn on, turn off, drop out, turn in, drop in [*grins*]. It is interesting that I omitted psychedelic drugs in that list of—

Fahey: Maybe that shows where you’ve evolved at this certain state in your life.

Dr. Leary: Well, no, I just take that for granted. I think we have to give a lot of credit to the pharmacologists and the psychedelic philosophers like Alan Watts, Aldous Huxley, Gerald Heard, our wonderful group at Harvard, and the dedicated LSD wizards like Stanislav Grof and Sasha Shulgin—the great designer drug wizard from Berkeley—

Fahey: Abram Hoffer.

Dr. Leary: And, of course, Hoffer. And the group around Al Hubbard, who was the great, enigmatic triple-agent.

Fahey: We could talk about the sixties all day long, but it wouldn’t serve much of a purpose. To what extent,

within this “reality smashing”—

Dr. Leary: Well, the word “reality smashing” is very tricky. What is real is what your neurons are processing. And hallucinations are just as real as anything on the outside. There’s an external reality and internal reality. Inner reality is certainly more important than the outer reality. It is the outer reality that we have to talk about, agree upon, fight over, and organize in order to survive. It’s very complicated, and I object to anyone grabbing the term “reality”—

Fahey: What I was getting at was, to what extent are the psychedelics *today* even a part of any movement to get beyond what we know as our day-to-day sense? Are psychedelics minor, compared to the computer applications that are going on today? Were psychedelics a launching point? Are they a thing of the past?

Dr. Leary: We’re talking about the brain. And unless you have some way of really activating the brain, people are going to use electrons simply as external devices for power, control, and money. So, yes, unless someone has had psychedelic experiences, they simply don’t understand how to operate or use electronic devices except for materialistic reasons. It’s no accident that the people who popularized the personal computer were Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak, both barefoot, longhaired acid-freaks. It’s no accident that most of the people in the software computer industry have had very thoughtful, very profitable, and creative psychedelic experiences. Bill Gates, rumor has it, was a very active psychedelic proponent when he was at Harvard, before he, uhh—

Fahey: Founded Microsoft.

Dr. Leary: Yeah. So, you could go right down the line of the people who are the—it’s well-known that the software, not the hardware, but the software so-called industry is *saturated* with people who have been turned on profitably, respectably, and creatively by LSD.

Fahey: Is there any future for the psychedelics, in either medical research or social applications? Or do you see any in the future?

Dr. Leary: Well, I think the medical profession, we all know that, is totally corrupt. Every doctor now is a corporation. And medical research in this country is government-sponsored and government-funded, or funded by large drug companies. I think that government corporations should fucking keep their hands off the brain-change substances.

The idea of a government-sponsored, authorized, doctor giving LSD to mess around with people’s brains is the ultimate Orwellian nightmare. The operational access to and use of your own mind and brain is a highly individual choice. Just as the right-wing government and politicians’ religions want to control women’s reproductive organs, they want to control brains. The key, here, is that adult Americans should be able to do with their minds or their bodies what they want to.

So, I’m *bored* with discussions of the social, because it’s highly individual—it’s not *just* individuals, it’s individuals in small groups. Because individuals, by themselves, taking psychedelics are alienated, lost, *fucked up*; you’ve got to do it in small groups. That’s the basic shamanic [way], which Socrates taught us, and which Aldous Huxley taught us at Harvard. Small groups.

Fahey: Do you think psychedelics can be replaced by other experiences, or will there always be a need for an internal ingestion of *something* to—

Dr. Leary: That’s like saying, will fucking be replaced as a form of sperm/egg interaction by sperm banks and egg banks? It’s all up to you.

We are told by the ethnobotanists and by the neurologists that there are probably seventy or eighty or more receptor sites in the brain for seventy or eighty different kinds of drugs—all, by the way, coming from plants. And we discovered maybe the twentieth now: the coca leaf, the marijuana leaf, the poppy seed, the ergot on rye, which is LSD.

But there are at least fifty plant products that we are going to be using in the next twenty years, so tough *shit*, Nancy—we’ve hardly begun this game [*laughter on both sides*].

* * * * *

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Part Ten

*"Try to forget me.
Try to erase me."*

—Pearl Jam, "Jeremy," 1992.

lix.

Let go the map, Charlie

Yes, OK, try that now. Charlie Pigeonfoot crawls, & I mean *crawls* from the Nada Theatre auditorium. Not sure he can leave or should leave. Leaves.

A long long hallway, green carpet with gold symbology runs down its middle.

Charlie stands, finds he can stand, can walk. Checks his possessions. Meshed cup wherein his key, checker, housefly—plus his comic book, *Curvilinear Comix*—

Let's play a trick on old Charlie—maybe help him out a little bit too—

For when he looks down at his old beloved dog-eared comic book it is shiny & looks unread—& is *Curvilinear Comix* #3, not #2.

Still the sub-title—"for those lost"

He wants to sit right down there in that long strange hallway & read this issue somehow in his hands—

But just then there is a cackle from inside his little cup.

The housefly may have talked to him in certain possibly hallucinatory moments, but it had *never* cackled.

He looks inside the cup & there with red checker & key is a housefly-sized little pandy bear, orange & red skirt, bright, large mischievous eyes, impossible to keep a smile from—

No. Not yet. Charlie limps, ambles, staggeringly races down that long hallway away from Nada Theatre.

Chandeliers above him every 50 feet or so. Tall arching windows above him on his left. Let in a murky brightness, behold no specific cloud, their bases so high above his head, no telling what behind the wall containing them.

There. *There*. Swinging doors. Either fresh air & escape or at least he's further free of Nada.

Bursts weakly through the doors into the reception & check-in area of the Noah Hotel.

More chandeliers. And mirrors.

He stands, falters, sort of drags himself over to the lounge of velvet crimson furniture. Armchairs & couches.

Sits heavily. *Is this still letting go the map?*

Peeks inside his cup. The imp is gnattering quietly, click-clicks, noise-noises. Waiting.

"Just behave & be quiet."

"Eh?"

"I'll find us somewhere safe to be, I promise."

A soft cackle in reply.

Whether he's brave or just too tired to be afraid, Charlie Pigeonfoot stands, staggers, stands.

Walks over to the front desk.

"Good evening, sir."

"I would like a room."

"Very good."

"I have no money."

"I see."

Charlie gulps. "I will pay for my stay by painting a canvas for you."

"Canvas."

Eyes closed, teeth gritted. "My name is Charlie Pigeonfoot. I used to paint blood canvases. I will pay with a new one. There's a girl. In the theatre. Let her know the room you put me into & that she can pose for me anytime day or night."

A pause. A few scribbles with a sharp pencil.

"Do you enjoy extra pillows?"

"Extra . . . ? Oh. Yes."

"Come with me, sir. Your message will be delivered."

"Leave the curtains closed. And turn out the lights when you go."

"Of course."

Silence.

"Yes?"

"I was there, at those parties you came to in the woods. The trips, the fire. All the girls."

"Yah. Fun times."

"Some of us, a few really, didn't think you were a party freak toy. I loved your work. I'm sorry I didn't do more to let you know, to help you."

"Yah."

Silence.

"I'll help you now. Deliver your message to her, I mean."

"Thank you."

Door shuts a moment later.

Charlie lies back on the firm single bed, still holding his cup & new comic.

Fingers the mesh off the cup & holds it so she can come out if she likes.

"You were a housefly."

Cackle-cackle.

"What I mean is, you're not my prisoner now. You can leave or stay with me."

Feels the imp in his hand. Sniffing. Takes a small bite of his palm. Considers. Desists more for now. Makes her way along him up to his shoulder, among the rags there. Settles in comfortably.

His comic book is glowing, very lightly at first, but then more & more brightly. Almost blinding until he opens it to look.

No title page, just a full page colored pic of a slim girl in a plaid skirt. Standing on an empty wide black-topped road, straight white line running down its middle into the far distance.

Near her, either side of the road, are blank flat grey fields, less than nothing to see. But far far down the road, toward the horizon of what can be seen, there are plumes of fires, impressions of things exploding, chaos, terror—

She is faced that way but turned back to look at the reader, half-smile, teasing, lightly imporing,

& the caption,
*"Come along, Charlie Pigeonfoot.
 Come along with me?"*

Delighted cackles on his shoulder encourage him to turn the page but, just then, there is a soft knock at the door, & a voice he too sure knows, "Charlie? Are you in there? Can I come in? They said you wanted me. I was surprised. It's me, Cordelia."

Let go the map, Charlie

lx.

The Creatures have slowly gathered some things together for Maya. She is as near as people-folk come to being like them, kin to them but, still, she *is* people-folk. They learn slowly to care for her as one.

Blankets. She likes blankets in the drafty coolness of their great cavern. Her favorite the soft brown one with fringes, bear faces cover it, watching her as they can, sniffing quietly. Often she wakes up whimpering from dream & they will *hmmmmmm* her back to sleep.

Her pink cat radio with the white face. She dreams of it often, & so the Creatures fashion one from materials they find above in the Tangled Gate.

It has no inner machinery but the Creatures & Maya play a game when she's of the mood. She pushes its round station dial, stops, & the Creatures will sing her a song, often dance too. Next station, a new song, a new dance. Or the floppy-charmed Dalmatian pup will tell some funny funny jokes with his crooked smile.

*"What did one wall say to the other?"
 "Meet ya at the corner!"*

She would often still lead them out to the shore to dive deep in waters & have adventures. One kind man she returns to again & again, but ever sadder.

"You would lay with me, Maya, but you love someone far from here."

Says nothing, purple eyes won't meet his.

He knows she's with him too, as they travel his lands. He is a Peace-maker. Sometimes violent, loud, refusing bribes shaped like daughters, gold, local power. Peace can come in the form of celebratory orgies, days of pipes & wine & meat. She simply waits in his tent when she has come. He learns she is not always in his tent or anywhere else.

He lets her stroke his cock, suck it, swallow, & sometimes his hand on her small firm breasts, a gentle press between her thighs. No more.

Then he follows her back. Follows her one deep night when his current peace orgy is roaring with drums, fires, a test to see if every cock on both sides of the former enemies can be plugged one & all in mouth, cunt, ass—

follows her as she moves swiftly as prairie wind to the shores of a sea some 20 or more miles away, if a real sea anyway—

she leaves her clothes & dives in & he follows & in truth would stand no chance of keeping up if he didn't feel the speed & guidance of a number of her Creature friends—

swimming down somehow becomes swimming up toward an unknown moon, maybe, unknown stars, or just in different places in the sky?

He surfaces, half-drowned, but sees her emerging onto the shore & follows—

The Creatures lead him along & he trusts, & thus he arrives from sea to shore, to cave to tunnel to great cavern—

"You followed."

"I did, Maya."

"Why?"

"To say goodbye. I'm sure your friends can lead me home safely again."

Talks again, more than ever back in his world.

"You're a good man."

"I know."

"You're alone."

"I know."

"Why?"

"Peace-makers often die violent deaths. Men resent peace if it is too well-shared."

"Why?"

I pause. Look around this great cavern I have been careened to. There is a great, great tree in its center, rises impossibly high to its unseen apex. Maya moves to include me under her blanket. Creatures sniff-sniff nearby. They'll allow me. Closest are a White Bunny, a grey hedgehog, a tan & brown little monkey with a bowtie. I don't reply.

"So you'll be alone again now?"

"I'm not alone, Maya. When I negotiate a peace, a good one, I become part of the tribes I've helped bring this peace to. Even if I die, what I do goes on."

She's quiet as she snuggles into my grasp under the Bear Blanket. They watch me too.

Speaks barely. "His name is Dylan. He's far from here."

"Can you go to him?"

"I don't know."

I think. "Maya, do you have friends?"

"Yes."

"Can they bring you to him?"

"I don't know."

"Can you ask them, Maya?"

"I guess so."

Silence.

"What's Dylan like?"

She smiles, soft & deep & brilliant.

"He's sweet. He's brave, like you."

"Have you lain with him? Or does he with another?"

Her face reddens obviously even in this dim. "No."

"Do you want to?"

Softly again. "I think so. Yes. I don't know if we can."
I nod. Leave this girl the rest of her secrets.

More Creatures nuzzle up to us, to me. I am accepted here. I am Maya's true friend & they are too. We doze close & warm & dreamlessly.

I wake up in my own tent, alone. Words, her words, lingering in my mind, left there waiting for me to wake to them.

"We'll travel again together, my Peace-maker friend. I need to find Dylan, with my friends' help. Thank you."

Sleep the only kindly medicine that can salve me this parting & pull me under.

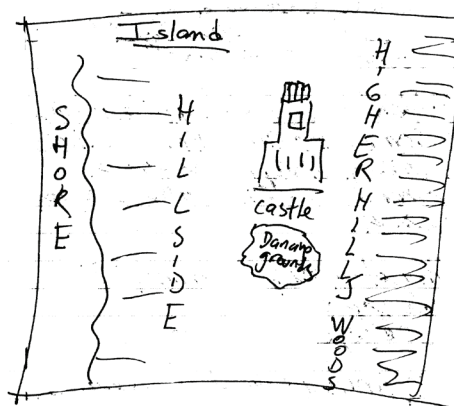
lxi.

Jazz stands, pulls me up. Leans up, grey eyes shut, I kiss her as lightly as I can, & only for a long moment. Her smile is sweet & delighted, eyes still, shut, tasting me as though I'm a special flavor.

We begin to walk & I want to put that brilliant brain of hers to work for us.

Feel in my pockets & amaze to find a scrap of paper & a stubby pencil.

Begin to draw a picture of what we know so far, from what we've seen & can see



The grounds around the Castle are unsteady to my eyes, which is disturbing.

"Like a kind of murk to things," I say aloud.

Jazz nods, my hand held tighter. Spooked. I wish I could leave her somewhere safe while I explored more. But she wouldn't, & there is nowhere trustworthy.

Suddenly we come quite plainly to something amazing. It's like my breath disappears for a moment & then resumes deeper & cleaner.

"I'm not afraid, Jasmine," I barely say aloud.
She nods, feels it too.

It is immensely tall & seems ancient, like a sort of tree from the beginning of the world.
"It's a Gate," Jazz says, awed. Her eyes shine how my heart feels.

A hundred feet high? Two hundred? A beautiful arch connects two ancient stone columns. We walk closer, hushed

& more, but still breathing freely, study the designs on the columns.

Jazz traces some with her fingers. "Creatures," she says. Smiling.

At the peak of the arch are words deeply carved & clear.

"For those lost," I read.

Jazz's smile at me is more luscious & sweet than I thought possible. "Let's go in."

"Do you think Ashleigh is in there?"

"I don't know. But something good is."

I nod.

So we walk through the Gate, hands clasped. Come to a great Fountain, tall plumes & bubbly waters. Old old stone.

Jazz doesn't hesitate to walk up to the Fountain & cup her hands to drink. I hang back, unsure. Unsure why unsure.

She motions me to her, her smile a hook in my heart's lips, accept her offered drink. Fresh, clean. Something else.

"Hmms?"

She nods. Her kind of strange puzzle to guess.

Sits us on the edge of the Fountain. Grey eyes closed & smiling for another kiss. I try gentle again & feel her harder press, even her tongue for a moment.

I start laughing.

"What, Toby?"

"I'm in love with you, Jazz. This is what it was like with Rosie. I mean. Um."

She nods. "I understand, Toby. That was hard."

I nod. "But she's gone. Like she told me. And I'm so damned happy here with you that it's OK. I hope she's happy too. That's something, right?"

Jazz nods.

I stand. Pull her up. We begin to look around where we are. Quickly determine there are two paths ahead, one on each side of the Fountain.

"Which one?" she asks, smiling.

I look down at her & for a moment let myself think which of her sweet small breasts I'd like to be fondling, sucking.

"Left," I say.

"Why?" she dares.

I say nothing & lead her on.

lxii.

I wouldn't always let Gretta-bird come with me on my adventures in the Attic. Too often, she would just sneak behind me somewhere & not let me catch her. Not quite anyway.

There was someone else I met that first winter. A girl, my age, so naturally Gretta didn't like her.

She was elusive, shy, playful, but she knew I would chase her & she led me along.

Knew about Gretta too & though she found her no threat, wanted her game with me to have no spectators.

Taught me a trick Gretta didn't learn for a long while. How to leave a false trail of Interates.

This girl knew my taste in girls before I did. Maybe she invented it for me.

She wore skirts long, below her knees, as few did back in my world. A single braid down her back. Pretty blouses, just tight enough.

Dark hair, blonde? I couldn't tell. Blue or green eyes? Tall as me? She led, but let me only so close.

She taught me how to reach places I would not have even imagined.

New York City. I looked up pictures of it months later, & I swear she led me through the streets of Manhattan, a red beret on her head. Was it real? Did anyone look in my eyes on those crowded streets as I followed her block after block?

That first winter she only let me near her once, the last night before I left. I came through a mirror deep in the Attic & found myself in a kind of drawing room. Her seated on a shiny crimson couch. Her dressed in a very low cut dress, high on her knees. Her blushing at me but steady.

I sat next to her.

"You're leaving."

"I'm going back to school."

"They told me this is what you would like best. I'm afraid I'm not that good."

"No. You're. Um. Crazy pretty."

More blushes. Both of us.

"Who told you?"

"Where I come from."

"Where?"

She leaned forward & I saw all of her breasts & my cock practically crippled me.

She was eyes closed waiting my kiss. I wanted to, I hadn't. I would. But.

A sound. Something falling.

She shrank back.

But I knew. "Gretta-bird."

"Who?"

"My cousin."

"She's smart."

"She's annoying."

But this girl was smarter still.

"Gretta-bird. Come out. It's OK. I'm not going to steal him from you. I promise."

Materializing in her way-too-short nightie, Gretta looked furious.

"Don't you call me that."

"I'm sorry."

"Jamie, let's go. We have to get back."

I look at her. That kiss is still on her lips for me but she nods smiling. "Good luck in school, Jamie."

Gretta commences to dragging me away when I stop.

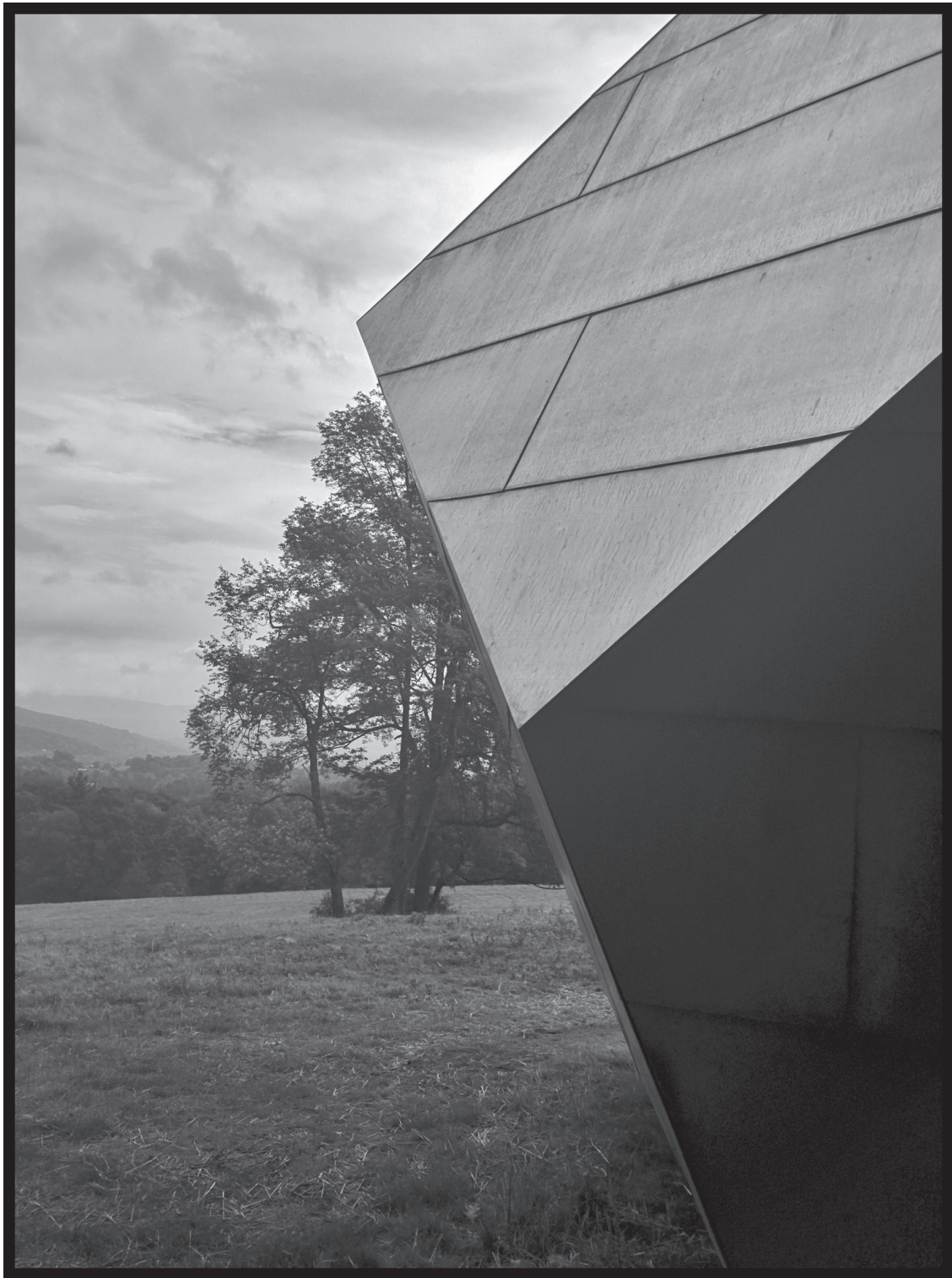
"What's your name?"

"Find me again. I'll tell you when you do."

Gretta-bird drags me back the long way to the living room, so I can enjoy her silent wrath for much time.

She barely speaks to me the next day as we have a special departure breakfast with our grandmother.

Who has figured out enough to smile & keep out of it.



Finally, Greta hugs me as we are parted to different tracks at the train station.

"I won't always be too young," she growls into my chest.

And the last words to me from our grandmother: "It's dangerous to let it affect you out there in the world. It can become an addiction, a substitute."

"Did it for you?"

Her eyes as dark & pretty as Greta's. "I had to stop going, Jamie. I haven't gone up there in so many years."

lxiii.

Bowie & Iris back in the house Bowie had lived in back when he & Iris just began their romance. She was so pretty he had to bite his wrists secretly to calm with her.

"That's funny, Bowie."

"It wasn't all I had to do."

"I'm sure."

"How about you?"

"Me?"

"Didn't you ever fantasize with your fingers about me?"

She laughs. *Still* too fucking pretty.

"It can't be just boys & men do it."

"It isn't."

"Are you saying yes then?"

She laughs.

It's a crowded party, Bowie's unsure how to navigate. Iris has an idea. Tugging the low-cut party dress she has on even lower, she walks up to the nearest gape-mouthed man in a short haircut in a tux. A whisper in his ears. Gulps, nods, points. Iris wetly thanks.

"Lucky him."

"He got a taste for some information. You get the rest."

"Harumph."

Whispers in his ear while leading him to his father's office. "I used to pull my white panties down for you oh . . . so . . . slowly, just to feel you entering me oh . . . so . . . slowly. I moaned with my mouth so wide & silent." Bowie nods, hangs on to her hand, gulps, in some order.

Father's office. OK. He's waiting.

"Come in, Garrish. And girl."

"Her name is Iris."

"I know."

"Then don't goddamn call her girl. And I'm Bowie."

"Is that all?"

"Why are we here? Back here?"

"I'm glad you are."

"Why?"

Bowie's father the same kind of tall angular glare on things. Iris realizes she could have fallen for either now.

"Because I'm sorry. I knew what Iris was & it scared me."

"I know. Answer my question."

"Bowie, you know I was a spy too."

He nods, knew, sorta.

"I knew about Emandia. I knew how important it was. Didn't you ever wonder how it is you & Iris met?"

Bowie sits down hard on the black leather couch in the dark-paneled office with heavy, closed curtains.

"How did we meet, Iris?" he whispers.

She sits down next to him. "I don't know."

"But it's like we've always known each other."

"Already loved each other."

Bowie's father nods. "It was this party, Bowie, Iris. Tonight."

"How?"

Shakes his head. "It was me. Bowie was such a loner boy & I wanted him to have a friend."

"And me?"

Stares bluntly at her. "You agreed to it because they had you locked up. I knew it was wrong. So I brought you back home &, once at this party, it wasn't possible to retrieve you back. *It's why I threw the party.*"

Bowie looks at Iris. "So you were my friend."

She nods. Suddenly laughs.

"But we were all over each other from the moment we met."

Bowie looks at her. "Did you know all this?"

Bowie's father shakes his head.

"I took care of that. Her memories didn't come back until you & I had moved."

"What did you think you were?"

Iris thinks. "I didn't. I was here, with you."

"Where did you go home that night?"

"She didn't, Bowie."

"What do you mean?"

"You had only one night together. I guess I freaked out. We left the next day. She went back. It was stupid. I had brought her back so they would let you & me go. We left so I knew you would hate me but move on."

"I never did."

"I know."

"Why are we here?"

Looks at them both. "Tonight you both go where Iris went."

"What do you mean?"

"I want you to go to the Island."

Iris looks shocked, remembering.

"Where I arrived."

"Bring Bowie with you. Show him."

"Why?"

"Because it's time you saw where your beloved comes from & made up your own mind about things. You deserve to know. Doesn't he, Iris?"

She nods, silently.

I walk into the office now.

"What?" says Bowie, angry, now half afraid I'll take her.

I look at them. "You met in a classroom. She would draw funny pictures & you would warn her when the teacher might notice."

Bowie's father looks at me. "They don't remember."

"Why?"

"All that never happened."

"Isn't that how she came to the party? Remember spin the bottle & closet?"

They look at me, blank.

I am carrying my pounds-heavy copy of *Labyrinthine* & I page through it for them, reading the relevant parts. They listen, unremembering.

"What is this?"

"Do you know my name?"

"Bowie's father."

He laughs. "You don't always know for sure, even in this book of yours. Sometimes it decides a better narrative course & rewrites retroactively."

"It?"

"*Just trust the book.* This is a better path."

"And those pages? That I wrote, in this book?"

He smiles. "It won't happen often. But after all these years writing this, *it will happen.*"

"Who decides?"

"The book decides. Mostly, it agrees with you. It likes you, Raymond."

"You're its spokesman?"

"In this scene. Not always."

Bowie cracks up. Iris tries not to.

I roll my eyes. "So you're sending them to the Island?"

"They are going."

"My choice or the book's?"

"Both this time."

I roll my eyes & walk out of the scene. This is a weird thing to occur.

Weird.

lxiv.

Jack & Isis are now away from the Realist party. They've gotten as far as an empty unlit road in deep country somewhere. Walking slowly along, far into the night.

"What's she like?"

"Who?"

"You girl. Penny?"

Jack's silent.

"You don't have to tell me."

"It's not that."

"What then?"

"It's just not easy to answer. It's like she was two girls."

Is laughs. "Most girls are at least two."

"I thought they were best friends. I screwed up one night & fucked the wrong one. Then I couldn't figure my way back."

"Didn't they help you?"

"No. Then something happened & I was sort of on the road to . . . here with you."

Is nods in the dark.

"Did you ever love someone, Isis? I mean really love someone?"

"I loved Samantha."

"Romantically?"

"Yes. I think so. I'd known her all my life. We were together in ways I'd never been with anyone before."

"What about all the boys?"

"That was me rebelling. Every other girl my age did it."

"Did any love you?"

"No. They wanted to fuck me, & Samantha knew it & told me."

"So you ran away?"

"Yes."

"Do you miss her?"

"I don't know if she was real, Jack. Maybe she wasn't."

"Tell me the thing you most remember. We have a long walk to anywhere tonight."

lxv.

The Heroes had been summoned to the Island again, a surprise. It had happened while they were on a lecture tour, much demanded, in which they described their heroic adventures. One year, climbing the steep & rainy Mt. Cloudy Day. The next traveling far along the Imaginal Hikeaway. And last year coming to the Island in very ancient times, traveling to the Great Cavern under the Tangled Gate, long before its big tree was tall, before even Creatures lived there.

They lectured to a packed crowd at the Ancienne Coffeehouse, telling of these travels, & also urging their listeners to become Heroes too.

Coming out of the Ancienne, the two Heroes encountered the Kittys in their Boat Wagon, seeming to be waiting for them. A glance at the dashboard showed there to be a **LETTER** button waiting to be pressed.

Pressed, & a letter pops out to be read. Unfold & its says:

*You must return to the Island
for a Secret Journey.*

P.S. Gather a good crew to go with you.

P.P.S. When you get to the Island, there will be a second letter.

So the Heroes went back into the Ancienne Coffeehouse & announced to those who'd heard their lecture their plan to take a Secret Journey & need of crew.

Over a dozen volunteered & all traipsed out to the Boat Wagon to start, while many others came outside to wish them well.

They all buckled up in the back—*Safety First!*—& rolled along till they passed through the White Woods & arrived at the sea. The Boat Wagon rolled on in & the Kittys paddled them the long way to the Island.

This time they arrived in present times, but the Natives had heard they were the ancient Heroes their ancestors had known, & welcomed them, & had them to their village to stay the night.

In the morning, the Heroes checked the Boat Wagon's dashboard & there was a **LETTER** #2 button. The letter read:

*Take a partial crew & travel with the Natives on their bicycular vehicles
deep in the Woods to the Long Pond.
Follow the Hmmm there &, when arrived, listen.*

So the Natives got the Heroes & some of their crew to pack up & rolled them, via the *Hmmm*, into the Woods, & to a very quiet place where the Pond was in view. They let them off, & rolled on, saying they'd return in awhile.

Now settled on rocks at the edge of the Pond, the group of Heroes & crew, a dozen or so, gathered close to quiet & listen.

The *Hmmm* here, along the pines-lined water's edge, was so quiet they had to listen way down low. Occasionally, a bird yowl or trill or call erupted, & the wind sometimes tousled the trees. The water swayed & created & fractured images of the branches & boulders at the edge.

Eventually, the Natives came riding back & the Heroes & crew returned to the village.

After a pleasant night's sleep, the Heroes checked the Boat Wage dashboard & there was **LETTER #3** button. Pressed, the letter popped out &, unfolded, read:

*Take the rest of your crew in the Boat Wagon &
follow the Path of Roots & Rocks to the Sea.
There, have a rest & then roll into sea.*

And so the Heroes boarded the Boat Wagon, & the rest of the crew, & were directed by the Natives toward the Path of Roots & Rocks, a difficult path, the Boat Wagon's claws out to climb through thick trees, among fallen trunks, patches of wild mushrooms, over small bridges, & down & down, & through the old apple orchard with its impossibly beautiful & shy deer, & finally arrived to the beautiful, beautiful sea.

Upon a high rock sat two great red wooden seats, & the Boat Wagon climbed claw by claw up to arrive.

Down below the wild, wild sea. The Heroes considered & then nodded to the Kittys to climb on down & roll on in.

The Kittys paddled the Boat Wagon into the sea, & for a long time along. Then in the distance they saw a speck in the air & approaching fast—

& it was Calgary the Sea Dragon! who looked upon them far below & said in his bemused gravelly voice, "Ah, Heroes! & Kittys! & Crew! Hello, my friends!"

Well, everyone waved to Calgary & cheered.

"Say," Calgary said, "Would you like to see a place few ever have?"

It being a secret journey they were on, the Heroes yelled assent.

Sea Dragon tail lowered to surface, Boat Wagon rolled on up & onto Calgary's noggin. *Thwumpp! Thwup! Thwumpp!* He flew them many miles swiftly until they came in sight of what could only be called a Secret Island!

Calgary flew down near to the shore, lowered tail to ground, & Boat Wagon rolled down & off.

"Have fun! I will be back to pick you up in the morning!" & with that, Calgary flew slowly away.

At the Heroes' signal, the Kittys peddled the Boat Wagon up the beach & into the Woods therein.

Meanwhile, back at the village, the rest of the crew began worrying the absence of the Heroes. They convinced the Natives to select their biggest & most sure-footed numbers to put on carrying apparatuses & travel swiftly the crew to the sea via the Rocky & Rootsy Path, which they did, & arrived, & of course they found no Heroes or crew.

Fortunately, one of their number was a White Bunny who glowed a signal that summoned Calgary the Sea Dragon to come.

"What is it, my friends?" asked he. The Natives crouched fearfully among the rocks, but the crew being Creatures were of course not afraid of their friend, & asked where the Heroes had gone.

"To the Secret Island! Would you like me to bring you too?"

And so Calgary lowered tail & the rest of the Heroes' crew climbed on, & up to noggin to ride on safely.

The Natives stayed ashore, promising to remain by the two great red seats till they all returned.

Soon Calgary was far out at sea & they approached the Secret Island. Arrive, tail down, crew onto the shore. "I will come get you tomorrow!" cried Calgary & flew *thwup! thwup! thwup!* away.

Meanwhile, the Heroes & their crew in the Boat Wagon had ventured far within these strange Woods, to places more of dream & mirage than solid form, rolling, floating, flying, till maybe stopping in a dreamsome place, felt enclosed like a clearing or cave or cavern, & there were just the basic elements of the world around them, an air current flowing in & around them, the musical chatterings of a stream or river, the crackle snap of low flames, & from the earth itself, if be, a kind of great horn, a sound emitting from it without lips blowing. *Hmmmming. Hmmm. Hmmm. Hmmm.*

The Heroes & the crew in the Boat Wagon seemed to evanesce in & out of being, always in tune with the *Hmmm*, always in tune—

& as though a valentine to them all, the *Hmmm* had led the rest of their crew to them & they were all reunited as the fire crackled, air current lifted & held them, water flowed through them calming, & the player-less horn *hmmm'd & hmmm'd & hmmm'd* out the world every new moment—

The Heroes & crew fell into a reverie unto dream & lost & found & clustered together OK—

Woke in the morning in a quiet empty clearing, not knowing what of it was real—

Boat Wagon rolled back to the shore & waited for Calgary to come, which he did, & he carried them all safely back to the Island where they had come from. Where many, many Natives were now anxiously waiting their return & “hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!” they cheered & cheered & carried the Heroes & Boat Wagon of crew upon their shoulders back to the Village.

There they celebrated their great Secret Journey & eventually said goodbye, the next morning, & Boat Wagon back to their own Island, White Woods, Village, & the Ancienne Coffeehouse.

And of course a fresh lecture about their new adventure, & a paw swept around to indicate the crew of new Heroes present, & much applause for all—

The Heroes came out later & they bid the Boat Wagon & Kittys adieu, having decided to just walk to their next lecture location.

Released from duty, the Kittys peddled their Boat Wagon through the White Woods & finally to the sea shore, & this time let her roll in & far into the sea, guarded surely & lovingly by Calgary the Sea Dragon somewhere high above . . .

Telling done, Maya switches off the Creature-powered pink cat radio, smiling endlessly at the epic tale they have told.

She sleeps, as always, deep among a cluster of them, fingers among the White Bunny, Hedgehog, many giraffes, & bears, a furry little squirrel in a warm orange sock hat, a brown monkey fellow, a black & white Dalmatian, quite a few duckys, so satisfied with their story she is able to sleep without dream or dreams this time—

Wakes up just as into the Great Cavern rolls none other than that Boat Wagon carrying none other than Maya's loved & long unseen people-folk friends, Christina & Kinley.

Looks once. Twice. Smiles. Frowns.

lxvi.

Isis reaches for Jack's hand as they walk along the empty road far from anywhere else, full moon above their own light.

“If you mean a boy, there was one, but it was only a little while. I suppose that's why I bothered with all the others later. I kept hoping.”

"I lived near a Woods, like these. Well, not that close, but I would wander pretty far from home & one time I found these Woods. And then I would explore deeper & deeper in them. Till one time I sorta stayed past dark & couldn't find my way back."

Jack nods, squeezes her hand, is listening.

"I wasn't tired so I just wandered deeper in. A full moon, like tonight. I was young, everything was magic to me still.

"I came to a sort of, I don't know, carnival? In a clearing deep in these Woods. How? Why?

"There was a girl older than me. Came up to me. Smiled.

"Can you sing?"

"Sing?"

"Yes. I'm sure you can. Come on!"

"And so she led me into a performance building, a stage, a dark audience I couldn't tell if full or empty.

"Just *hmmm* to my singing to start."

"*Hmmm*?"

"Yes, later you'll learn the words."

"So I did. I held her hand, looked into her beautiful auburn eyes, breathed quietly the scent of her long curly brown hair, wished my hasty blouse curved half as much as her loose flowing dress. I *hmmm*'d for her & hoped to do it OK. She held both my hands, smiled for the audience even while she stared deep into me, & it was wonderful."

Jack smiles too. "Sounds like a dream you had, passed out cold in the Woods, Is."

Shakes her head. "We were performing night after night, I never thought of my old life. Slept at dawn & all day. Sang & sang.

"Then one night at a break, she said, 'he wants to talk to you.'"

"Who?"

"The boy who comes every night to watch you." A strange smile & she was gone, & a blonde boy older than me was sitting on the log next to me.

"Hi."

"Hi."

"You sing so beautiful."

"It's my partner really."

"He moved closer to me & though I felt breathless, I wasn't scared. Held me close, hand inside my blouse like it had always been there.

"You have such soft breasts."

"They're small. I'm sorry."

"I like them. I like you."

"I wondered what would happen next, but then he stood up & smiled. 'Showtime.' And I returned to sing.

"So what happened?" asked Jack.

"They couldn't take me when they moved on. They had to go. They had her bring me to the edge of the Woods. She hugged me so tightly & it's like she, she melted away in my arms," & here finally Isis breaks down, crouching on the ground, sobbing like she'd held it since that moment. Which she had.

Finally stands. Nods, OK. They walk on.

"Is the story of Samantha a happier one for you?"



lxvii.

Jazz & Toby walking together in the Tangled Gate, walls on either side of them at least a dozen feet tall, made of tightly woven vines & stones.

For a long stretch, straight paths that would turn occasionally, once in awhile a choice, but nothing revealing in it, just twists & turns.

"Where are we going, Jazz?"

"I don't know."

"Toward Ashleigh & your Master?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

Stops. Looks closely at her.

"What's wrong?"

She smiles. "I like it here. Don't you?"

He looks around. "I think so. But what happens next?"

"I think that's for us to decide."

Toby nods. Thinks. "Can we arrive somewhere now?"

Jazz laughs her brilliant sweet laugh. Leads him by the hand along around the next corner & *voila!* They are arrived.

Everything changes. Toby panics, but feels her hand still, murk? blindness? Feels like he's indoors, a house. Finds a wall & makes his way along . . . a doorway . . . another one . . . a third . . . a far wall.

Then something, feel along . . . OK then, another doorway & in.

Sight. *Woah.* Sound. A party. Feels for Jazz's hand, it's fainter but there.

A crowd, the men in suits, women in low cut & high slit dresses. Music is some kind of old jazz. Mirrors on all the walls, I don't notice them at first.

A woman tugs me over to a couch. She's younger than I thought. Her eyes pale blue, glinting, playful. I let my eyes droop down between your breasts. Squeezing Jazz's hand as wispy as it feels.

"Which one are you?"

"I'm. My name is Toby."

"You're cute. I'm Ashleigh."

I stare at her. Twice. Is it?

Why can't I remember?

"Are you a jock?"

"I. I was."

"Football?"

I nod. She leans nearer me.

"Do you have a sister?" I ask quietly.

Does she flinch or no?

"Would you like to fuck me?"

Something catches my eye, over her head, the large mirror on the brick-style wall.

What. *What?* Jasmine? In the mirror? She's motioning to me. Nodding to me. *Tell her yes.*

I lean nearer to her ear. "I still play dirty."

She laughs though I see a flinch in her eye. Something.

She leads me out of the room, down a crimson-lit hallway into a room of bed & mirrors.

She's pushing me down on the bed & I'm looking to every mirror in the room for Jazz. *There she is.* On the mirror over the bed. She's nodding.

Ashleigh looks different, her hair a long dark blonde, but her mouth is the same, curls to laugh at any boy who'd try for her prize. Her after thought of a dress reminds me of how much I wanted to fuck this girl.

But the girl I love is in that mirror watching me kiss Ashleigh's neck, kissing down her body as I undress her, her enjoying, Jazz watching, her expression for me unchanging, loving me, encouraging me, my lips on her fine high tits, sucking, biting, her flinching a little, me biting more, down her flat tummy, her thong off & the flinch is a tremble, but my tongue lapping her shaved lips, lapping harder, licking to taste her clit, tasting it, sucking it, her moaning, something trembling in this now, I *feel it*, I look up for a moment at her eyes closed, clenched, Jazz in the mirror beyond her, nodding, *more, more*

I tongue her very wet & then lift up & push her roughly on her tummy, push her legs apart, push her hard down as I mount her, "say it"

"mmm"

"say it"

"fuck me."

"say it, you whore."

"*fuck me! o fuck me!*"

I position myself to drive in her & I would but she is stiff & struggling & Jazz is shaking her head now.

I roll off.

She turns, looks at me. "Why did you stop?"

"Don't you remember me?"

"Should I?"

"*I'm Toby.*"

"You said that."

"*You're Ashleigh.*"

She smiles. "That's true."

"Jasmine & I came to rescue you."

She looks surprised. "Who? Rescue me from what?"

I want to point to Jazz in the mirror, but suddenly she's not there.

She smiles more. "Come on, lover. You're fun. Let's do more."

"You were struggling."

"I know."

"So I stopped."

"I don't want you to. I want you to make me struggle more. I like it. Gets me off."

I grab my pants & hurry them on. Walk out.

Suddenly back where we were. The vines & stones walls all around us. Jazz & I slumped on the ground together.

She wakes & looks at me.

"Why did you stop?"

"I didn't want to."

"No? Are you sure?"

I stand. "Fuck, Jazz. Yah, I used to want to fuck her. Every guy did. That's what girls like that want. Makes them feel good."

"But?"

"*But you.*"

She's still looking at me way too seriously.

"You don't want her now?"

I think. Turn away & think. Turn back.

"I'm built to fuck. But I choose who. I choose you."

She remains sitting, looking at me. Then she softens, raises her hands for me to pull her up.

We kiss, but very softly.

"That felt real, Toby."

"I know."

"Was that my insecurities like, um, made into something that seemed real?"

"I don't know. Maybe."

I think. "I suppose your ex-Master is next."

"Are you jealous of him?" she sounds shocked.

"Or the boy at your school."

"Toby!"

"Jazz, this place seems to know us really well. It's a magical place, I guess."

She nods. Thinking. That's good.

"So you think it will test me too?"

"I don't know. But maybe we only get somewhere if we pass them when they come. The tests."

Now Jazz's smile is soft & sweet for me, with that hint of mischief, she eyes closed leans up to me.

I kiss her softly, as I think she likes, but her kiss presses me for more, so I swallow her closer to me, into my arms, my mouth, she's loosing to me newly, long & slow. I loose to her too, forget where & who & what & then I open them & I am not there again.

Jasmine in a halter top & a too-short skirt. Hair tied back. We're in a, I look around, a library?

I'm scrawnier, smaller, but somehow, um, smarter? It's why I'm supposed to tutor her? *Her?* In what?

I look down at the table we're sitting at. Open books. Poetry. Shit. No.

"Read to me."

"Read?"

She leans forward & her small finger taps the book in front of me. Remains leaned forward near me until I have a good gaze into her braless halter top. *Shit.*

She's waiting.

"No."

"No?"

I shake my head.

"Why?"

"You wouldn't win him just with your body. You didn't even really know if he liked you."

She leans back. "How do you know that?"

"I don't know. I just think you didn't."

She nods. "Another test of you."

I nod. "Why?"

She shakes her head, each shake wiping away that library. We're still standing facing each other, like we just stopped kissing.

I nod, keep her hand, start walking on again.

"Toby?"

"This place can test me all it wants," I say, my voice rising, "I'm not letting go this pretty girl's hand & I'm not fucking anyone else!"

Jazz laughs merrily. Then stops.

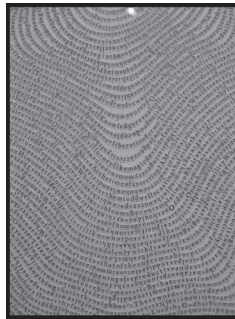
Pulls me stop. Face her.

"Me too," & we hug a long time.

lcviii.

A grand canvas of words, twisting & spinning, barking, *hmmmming*, furry, heavy-leaved, warming me happy—speaking words for me

**I hunger
for: the
illusory like
devoid of
or: there
bondage
for me
knowledge
& self is
*I hunger.***



**& strive
world is
magic
any essence
is neither
nor liberation
or: Self-
reveals all
the revelation.
*I strive.***

I wake, cramped bus. Shit, again. Look out window, nearly there, used to be a good thing, even exciting. Things seem to diminish.

I sit in back next to a pretty girl, the kind I've seen all my life & wished to talk to.

Say what? "Hi, you are so pretty I would like to slowly study you, inch by glowing inch, but then I'll get heated up & wish to fuck you, & this is a pretty poor opening line, isn't it?"

Say: "What is your power over me? How is it in my bones & mind alike to *want* you? How can want be so real? What does it feed?"

Say: "Hi, I'm the nicest guy you are ever going to meet &, I assure you, I want to make you happy."

Each one worse than the previous. Sad. Boringly sad. I feel old though a skinny age still, feel like a skeleton buried in a dead fire.

I tilt my head & peek. She's reading some kind of handmade book of bark & leaves? Wrapped in ribbons. The print looks like it was written by dipping a twig in dark old blood.

Knowing I can't keep looking, I used my old bookseller's trick of scooping up a line of text quickly to read in my mind:

*Yesterday it came to me: the guilt, the anguish, the rage, that's driven me this far out—it's this life
I've never fully controlled—*

She's looking at me, stopped, turned & looking at me. Her long red hair loosely tied into a jumble of curls, her turquoise eyes net mine & no escape. "Your stop is here. Here's your book to take"—pause, smile—"& a kiss from someone you will meet one day soon"—leans into me, eyes closed, her lips on my cheek like a soft, lingering rain, impossibly slow. My eyes closed too, I feel her lean away again, drift in cherry vanilla scent a moment.

Stand suddenly, the book she tucked into my grasp hardly felt as I lurch toward the back door to get out. I'd forgotten to pull the buzzer wire. This driver knows me & my stop though. I'd smiled in brief words at his Cleveland Browns hat once, & made a friend.

"That Johnny Football!" he calls to me as I half-wave a hand & drag myself upright off the bus.

Alright, so here I am at my bookstore, my job, much of my life since I was a kid. It's massive, an old block-long factory that hulks darkly against the sunniest sky.

Arcadia Bookstore & Cafe. The Cafe is a few red metal tables & chairs in front of one of its entrances. Big white birch trees surround this so-called "courtyard cafe." I usually sit in the corner-most table near the trees.

The Bookstore never closes. I'd worked in it all hours of day & night. Since I was 12. Since the day I'd gone in, horny for something better than figure skaters & gymnasts on TV.

Wandered it uncaring the books really. *Where's the porn?* My friend Muddy had a few, some good ones he'd shown me. But I needed my own, & a private hour. He told me about this place, said they had lots, & no security cams or anything.

I wander in deeper, worry the porns are behind a curtain with an 18+ sign. Yah, right, like if you're 18 you need porns. I was 12 & skinny & acne'd & the only thing impressive about me was how hard my cock got these days at the wiggle of girls, leaves, water, whatever. I needed porn for the long road ahead to 18. I had no money & knew they wouldn't sell to me. I wondered why nobody cared for my problem. Why there wasn't a good answer for me? Muddy laughed & said that's what porns are for. I didn't think so. Didn't girls get horny too?

Found them in a shadowy corner toward the back, next to the old lady romance books. Funny.

There it was. *Oui* magazine. A long row of cheerleaders, the usual tight sweaters & ass-short skirts, save for one, caught in mid-turn with her sweet little panties-less ass flicking hello to the camera.

It wasn't real. Just a studio, 20 takes to get that ass's best angle.

I didn't care. My cock *didn't* care. This magazine was going to be my new best friend, as I headed aimlessly toward the door, my new girl slid under my worn out old wool pea jacket.

But no, a tall tall man casually makes his way toward the exit. I hurry, slow, panic, would leave my new girl in her underwear dilemma just to save my own far less pretty ass & live to rob another day.

He approaches me. *Fuck*, he's tall. Long grey hair, sideburns. A face chipped lightly from a fairly ugly rock. Dominating blue eyes catch mine & won't let go. *My feet won't run*.

His hand is out. I whimper. *Fucking* whimper & hand over my girl & her fully-pantied crew.

Looks at the cover. *Smiles. Licks his lips*. Nods. I follow him uncuffed to his office. Seems like it's both up & down stairs. It's dark. He lights up a weirdly shaped black candle. Nods me sit. I do.

His chair looks like it was lightly chipped too, but from a redwood trunk. He's still looking at the cover. *Smiling. Lips licked*.

Then puts it among the piles on his vast desk. Silence. Meditating? Napping?

Talks suddenly & I jump. His voice is low, clear, even musical. Can't help noticing.

"I can see why you picked her."

I say nothing.

"They're as helpless as we are. All of us. DNA programming & mortal self-consciousness."

I don't breathe. He sounds like a preacher or a teacher. Maybe he will forgive?

"I'll call the cops now."

"No. Wait. Please."

He hasn't reached for a phone. I don't even see one.

"Yes?"

"I'm, I'm sorry."

"Sorry you got caught."

"Yes. To be honest. But not just that."

"What then?" His eyes again heavy on me, but patient, letting me talk.

I don't think. I talk. "None of them like me. And it makes me crazy. Sad & angry."

He nods. Waits.

"I didn't even like them last year!"

He smiles. Waits.

"I'm sorry you caught me. But I'm sorry I did it too. It's just not—"

"Not what?"

"Not fair!" I yell, not meaning to.

He's silent. Nods. Picks up the magazine & hands it to me. "Write your name down for me."

I panic. Start to shiver badly.

He continues calmly. "I want you to work off the cost of that magazine. Starting tomorrow. Show up at 6 a.m. If you're late, I'll dial the police. But I understand. So this is your chance."

That was 8 years ago. That tall tall man became my boss, & my friend.

I worked behind the register for years before I was allowed to go up beyond the main floor of new & used books. To enter through the back door, with an old rusty key I'd earned, follow the long dim hallway to the first ramp up. Find worlds upon worlds beyond.

Her book's been in my lap, unnoticed, till it falls to the ground. I pick it up gingerly, feeling how fragile it really is.

The next page seems far more for notes than a continuing narrative. I read:

**** I visited some old friends, but their place was so cluttered & dirty I had to use their bathroom to clean up. But the sink's faucet wouldn't run, just some black dust came out of it. And the tub was half-filled with old towels, half-failing to sop up some black muddy water. I came out dirtier for trying & found V showing off her S&M artwork to a group of longhaired tiedyed but strangely formal & unfriendly hippie-types. Girls of all kinds in these black & white etchings. Chained to walls, to guns, to trees, to old convertibles, each by a thin golden chain affixed to their tongues, nipples, clits. None smiling, none suffering. But one. Long red hair, turquoise eyes. She leans up against a white birch, the gold chain tying her hands to it, her curls among the chain's links. Smiling, very faintly. Mocking, just so. **Some things you just can't prison.***

**** I have a silver electric notebook, flexible, soft, sometimes sits in my lap & **hmmms** when I am reading instead. Attached by a golden chain is a clear pen, lit to work by its wick But I'm homeless for awhile & lotta rain & notebook gets wet & whimpers, & I panic because I have no friends, & **now this—***

**** The last thing I did before leaving for good was to buy a cassette of an old album called **Sco'u'tland** by James McGunn. It's 90 minutes long, songs, stories, & fragments, & I go to the public library to look him up but . . . **nothing**. Not even a review of his album. Nobody at the crazy bookstore knew. City block long & . . . **nothing**.*

Wait. *What?* My bookstore? Maybe. I get up & push the knobless oak door in; sometimes gets stuck & you risk splinters trying.

There's a movie poster on the door, now embedded in it. That's what happens. It absorbs the poster tacked on it, *changes them* before consuming them entirely.

Looks like a spaceman far from home, sitting slumped on a planetoid next to a strange ship. A tugboat? Called *Alone*. "*How will Daniel get home?*" the poster asks.

Immediately inside is the store's map rack. Even on this first floor, the book sections shift locations daily. One of the store's many mysteries is how & why this occurs.

Rack's empty though. It happens by this time every afternoon. Then the maps need to be collected from where they've been left on shelves, displays, the floor. I've collected them up *many times*.

But I know a corner that's always free. never a bookcase placed there. When I was about 14, one of the older girls, she had red hair & turquoise eyes too, took me there. Kissed me on the cheek & said, "*She will like you so much.*"

Settling in: Turn to my book's next page. Back to longer narration:

My father & I went to an abandoned complex, where he said when he was young he would win track trophies, football crowns, baseball awards. "Abh the girls," he whispers as he limps along beside me.

The Fountain in the middle has hardly moved, no matter the weeds filling the stream that once fed it. He drops back to pass, staggers, throws me a long one I make to catch like football-shaped air. I pitch him a fastball of air & he POW! drives it over that falling down grandstand where ghosts of girls lick lips knowing, or intending to know.

He nods, starts to drift away, stops suddenly, looks down at a puddle. I join him. Shaggy tree in puddle.

***He points
"That's you."
& around us,
no tree.
his heart.***



***down.
Looks up
ruins,
Touches
"Me."***

"You're here!" says the happy, familiar old voice above me. My old boss, waving around *The Literary Book of Us*. "It has your answers!"

His name is Jester, or at least all anyone has ever called him. He's indeed about 7 feet tall, 80 years old, crystal blue eyes. Climbs mountains with pretty girls part his age, reads old poetry aloud, declaiming to the clouds, while they quietly masturbate.

I show him I have a book. His rocky ugly face cringes. Handmade books writ in blood spook him.

I nod. He reads, loudly, so everyone can hear him: "*Traveling a war-torn country with his dog, a beautiful robot, & every few miles the dog will sniff out a pipe of operational waste to empty. Takes an hour. She needs a good cleaning out after.*"

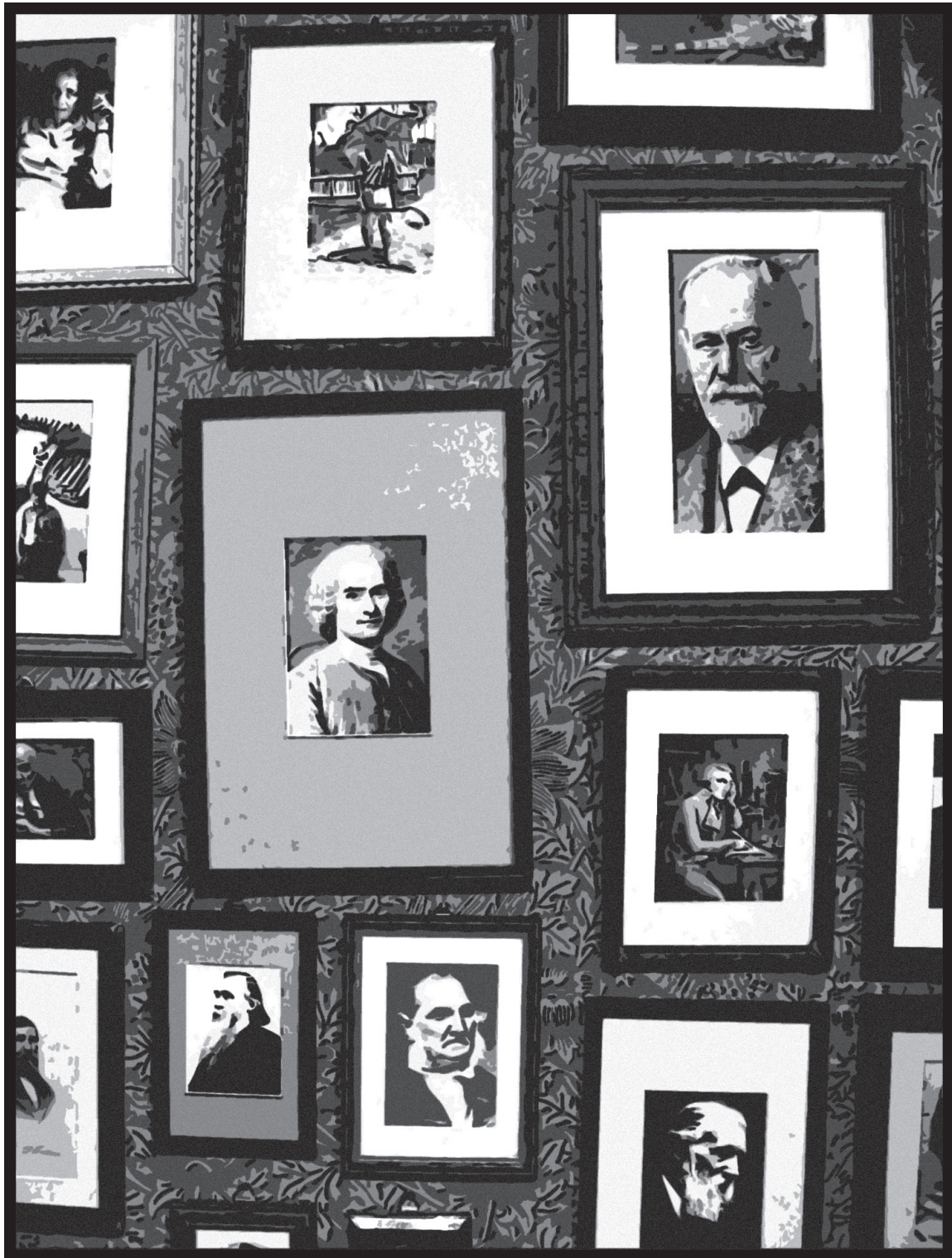
I nod, smile, hold up my book again, to remind, & he slowly leaves me be. I'm not sure what he does now, since he's rarely down on the main floor anymore.

Stand up, take my book & navigate mapless to the back door. My key rustily opens the door & I push inside. There's music as I walk through the tunnel. Bright guitars, pulsing organ & cello, & a man quiet's voice singing: "*Curse the day / I'm cursing / All the way & back again / into town to meet my maker / four feet tall, & full of sin / Feeling like I'm noone's monster / I lift him up / with my revenge / now I'm free / but I feel no revelry.*" Hugs me like a brother & evanesces.

The ramp is warm & very old, like fossilized wood. I'd left my shoes in one of the slots in the case reserved for shoes. *House rules: barefoot.*

Climb & climb, knowing I'll come to the floor I need. That's part of why the public isn't allowed up here—the panic of not knowing where you'll end up, nor when you'll return. *Everyone does return though.*

I climb & climb & finally arrive to a doorway & enter. No books in sight. It's a party. A room whose walls are covered in portraits of pretty Creatures: crooked smiling Dalmatian; big brown-eyed little bear; a purple-spotted



shiny-eyed leopard kitty; a little black-&-white pandy bear in a red & orange dress; a brown & white beagle puppy; & a long-eared White Bunny. A big couch crowded with people who are listening to a red-haired faerie-dressed girl reading from a book that looks like mine!

More singing than reading:

*People cut themselves to relieve the deeper psychic pain they feel with physical pain. I punish my body
& waste my time. One pain relieves another.*

Pauses. Turquoise-eyed twinkle at me. Reads on.

*I did that with booze & LSD. Replaced one with the other. At my best I replace waste with Art. It's
a balance.*

The crowd is pretty, dressed in tie-dye rags & long hair. But somehow unfriendly, un-hippie. But they like this song & want the rest like they know it well. I see them mouth along her final words.

*Maybe I have 25 years, 30, 40, who knows, left, but I won't necessarily be better than I am now.
That past & much of its people will keep diminishing.*

I turn & leave, let the store know I have to move along. But now I know there are two books, & two girls had them. So maybe more girls, more books. For the moment, I climb the warm ancient ramp to the next level I'm given.

This one is books. Narrow aisles, floor-to-ceiling bookshelves, the floor half in shadows, half in candlelight. And the books are so tightly shelved that I can't randomly choose a volume. Just read that each volume is titled the same thing: **Go Into the Green.**

I've walked some miles through these tightly packed shelves when I see daylight through a far door with a window. Hurry, look through,

& my eyes seem to with the view an alley. half-folded upon two red doors impossibly. dirt floor growling with fury or despair. A badly-sprained corrugated metal wall.		twist I see of A brick wall itself, its bent back The alley's
--	---	---

I pull back, & half-fall to the floor. My book is partly torn apart, its ribbons fraying, its bark crumbling. I open it up to read again, *hurry*.

We went down to the pond again, my older brothers & me. Not light yet, stumbling, but somehow made it. They wanted to photograph the lily pads again, using their ancient cameras on tripods, focusing under their black cloths. Opposite sides of pond. They waited, & waited, for the black jellyfish-like plants to drift by as they would. I was there for luck. I'd been with them the first time they'd found this pond, & these lilies & jellyfish-plants.

They were high school football players otherwise. And years later, they both ended up in motorized wheelchairs. Not from football, or a car accident. It was because they got sentimental & we three came back to the pond, & the jellyfish-plants were angry for the years' absence. Stinged & stinged. I ran, because I was a coward. I sent help, because I loved them.

I have brothers in wheelchairs. I think? Maybe I wish I had brothers like these, even if they did end up in wheelchairs.

A long way back to the entrance & I feel like one more floor to climb. So I do. If the bookstore didn't want me to, I would find none. I do, so I climb & climb. Suddenly arrive, & standing in the doorway is the girl who had shown me the free corner when I was 14. Dressed in what looks like a long single bloom from her red hair to her bare feet.

"Are you the others too? Are you all the same?"

Turquoise eyes twinkling, she says, "If you can find me this time!" & she evanesces among the many rows of bookcases behind her. "Use the book!" her words linger in my ear.

In my hand, the clear pen that lights by a wick. I find matches in my pocket, from some joint called Luna T's Cafe, & I light it. Page through my tattered book until I find a page with her words forming on it as I watch.

"Hurry!"

I write: "Give me a clue."

She writes: "Go into the Green."

I nod.

Carrying my disintegrating volume, I walk through the stacks, no longer really looking at them. This feels like something new, like arrival. I'm dressed in several ragged shirts, & I shed them all but one that says inside a crude circle: "*The Cycle is Complete.*"

My jeans are ragged too; I tighten them with my old belt. Bend down & double-knot tie my worn black sneakers. Finger-comb my long tangled hair, fingernail rush my beard. Move with intent.

My book *hmmms* when she writes again. "*Look up!*" I do & see as I hadn't before that this floor has sky for roof. She's up there, smiling, waiting for me, her hand held toward me.

I close my eyes, let myself rise, forget I don't know how to rise. A long sweet saxophone solo rises in my mind, helps me steer eyes-closed, until my hand feels another's grip me, pulls me closer.

She doesn't talk but our hands remain closely clasped, & she leads me into the sky, higher & higher, until we come to a doorway, as though the sky was the next ramp up. We arrive & are standing in a quiet room with many of my co-workers, including my old boss, & the several red-haired girls who have haunted my years.

'Tis an old canvas on the wall, a painting signed by John Reid, a vast tree, big as a city, "Where all men & women will live in the future," says my old boss. "Look deeper in," he advises me, & I do, & it's like

*I enter
happy
& stay,
within
& the glare
through
nudging
to close,
again.*



*this future
world, & stay,
see more trees
this great one,
of a sunrise
them,
my eyes
& to open*

And when I wake up in the vestibule of the bookstore I have worked in all these years, my hand holds only a few crumbs of bark, & a scrap of paper, written in a girl's curlicue hand: "*You'll come again soon!*"

lxix.

It's hard to recall in deep detail these crazy many years later, & yet it's awed to my heart by sadness, regret, anger, want.

I wanted this girl not just because she was pretty, had tits, an ass, a luring female voice, soft girlish ways.

No, I wanted her because I had become friends with her, learned her hopes, her secrets, what made her laugh, excited. She'd told me when Harry Chapin died, that July, & even though I knew only a few of his songs, I broke apart & cried, & bought all of his albums, & found someone in him I deeply loved too. She'd told me on the phone. I thank her still for this.

I wasn't a boy with many friends, especially female, living in a dirty, crowded, angry, sad, shame-filled house. Why didn't someone take a different move on things? Rally us together in family love & loyalty? Why did it all stink? We were innocents in a hard brilliant green world & should have loved each other in perpetuity forever.

I went to her party that November 14 night, a Saturday night like this one, all sweaty glands & old clothes & so in love with this girl I saw no other truth. *Nobody could possibly love her as much.*

I try to recover that feeling tonight to understand. My life was one of virtual helplessness. Nobody I could lean against, nobody to advise me. I just kept trying, & if this girl had said yes maybe my life would have been different. Maybe she would have seen how I was living & urged me otherwise.

And this night, we sat in your bedroom & you wondered aloud about us dating. Worried it. Like you valued my friendship more than the risk of romance. Like it had to be a profound choice. Couple days later, you moved on to another boy though I chased you for *four more years*.

Why write at length of this in this book? Why interrupt its stories for this fragment?

Best I can say is that as only a few other days in my life, Nov 14, 1981 re-invented me from what I had been. A sense of hope, then of rejection, then simply persistence. Trying to understand me, the world, even if incompletely, even if none of it ever fully said.

I had a chance, it was lost. Maybe I chased that particular chance too long, & a lot of others after, but it was the first time I'd had that chance. Maybe it wasn't a failure, loss, defeat.

Maybe it was just the obscure beginning of a very long path to success. *Someone loving me was possible.*

lxx.

A mélange to finish Part 10 of this big, strange book, reporting from the various doings it's told of, try it like this:

Jazz & Toby? We find them walking hand in hand along one of the countless paths of the Tangled Gate, twists one way & another, the viney walls meshed with stones too high to see over. Toby tries to climb one but it's like the vines form fingers that reach into his clothes & tickle him, just enough, that he starts to slip & comes down.

So they walk on. Path ends suddenly before a very tall & dark cave. Jazz keeps walking toward it as Toby stills.

"Come on."

"Why?"

She smiles at him, grey eyes starred with affection & fun.

"It's next, Toby, in our adventure."

Toby stares at her. "I'm afraid, Jazz."

She comes back for him, hand out. Smile holds him tight & warm as she leads him to the cave mouth.

He watches her disappear into its blackness even as her hand does not let go of his & keeps pulling him along. The darkness is thick, is warm, seems to feel them entering, like water, like *knowing water?*

But her hand, he can't see her, but her hand.

And she's talking to someone.

"You've come for protection."

"Yes. For both of us."

"What do you sacrifice for this protection?"

"I won't look for my sister anymore."

Silence. Yet the darkness seems to nod.

Isis & Jack. She's remembering Samantha.

"She was always beautiful. Long brown-green hair, long to her waist."

"Green?"

"Yes like green & brown dreadlocks, sort of, almost, like seaweed."

Jack nods. He's taken her hand as they walk along this empty road through deep woods. It's a gesture of protection. Maybe for both of them.

"She would mostly sleep with me in my bed. I would wake up with a special feeling, warm, close, & she would be holding me."

"She'd just appear?"

"Yes. And we'd talk. And I would always fall asleep & she would usually be gone in the morning."

"She protected you?"

"Yah. On the commune, when I left, like I told you, but always."

"When did you meet her?"

"That night when the Carnival left me. I walked home."

"Were your parents mad?"

"No, Jack. It was the *same night*."

"That you left?"

"Yah. I just came in quietly & went to bed."

"Wait, how? How did you know?"

"Because they would knock on my door every night, to hear me say good night. To check. I couldn't explain it. I didn't care. *They were gone*."

"So you slept?"

"I woke in her arms, dreaming of the sea, deep in the sea, & a sort of *hmmmmmmmming* in my mind."

"Were you scared?"

"I thought they had sent her to me. I was *happy*."

"Had they?"

"I don't think so. But she told me something that helped."

"What?"

Is stops to think, & remember, eyes closed. "She told me that my life would be different now. She said that once you enter the Woods, live in the Woods, they stay in you, you stay in them always."

"Was there more?"

"She said the world is one, none, many things. Woods, seas, mountains. But men's visions are fractured & they only see many. They talk of *one* & *none* too, but few of them see these too."

Jack is quiet. A strange thought.

"Can she help us find Penny?"

Isis smiles brightly in the dark.

"Find us a bed & I'll ask if she comes."

Maya. Christina. Kinley.

She stands up. The many Creatures clustered around her sniff once, twice, but these are people-folk friends they know. It's safe.

Christina comes to Maya right away, grasps the scrawny girl in her arms.

Kinley holds back a little, waiting to see what the feral girl will do with Christina. But, slowly, Maya's untelling

face relaxes in Christina's arms, into affection, into a smile. Then he approaches.

"We missed you," he says quietly. Christina finally lets her go but her hands. Maya nods.

Kinley notices a rock flat enough to sit on, & takes a corner of it, motioning the others. The Creatures seem to be clustering & dozing again.

Christina sits with Maya in her arms, half in her lap. Knowing his love is near as feral around people as Maya, Kinley is pleased.

"Maya, do you know of a set of little colored magical books that tell the story of Marie the schoolteacher & her many travels with Creatures like these? Including your White Bunny friend?" Kinley says this fast, not knowing what Maya will say or do.

Maya looks at him with her exotic purple eyes, blinkless, adjusts a bit in Christina's half-lap, & nods.

Kinley stands &, reaching into one of his long coat's pockets, pulls out shiny little book after book, blue, red, green, orange, brown, & so on, & sets them in a low row before the two girls.

Creatures all over the Great Cavern wake up, fully, sniffing, alert.

"Can you read them, Maya?"

"I . . . I think so."

Bowie. Iris. How they get to the Island is my business so I lead them to a door in the house through which they walk to the docks & to a great old boat with big sails. Gangplank for loading passengers & cargo.

Bowie takes a fair while trying to get a good look at the boat's name.

Comes back to Iris & says, "Tis the Good Ship Kerr-Plow-eee!"

Iris smiles. This shift of locale has made her less uptight than she expected. She's glad to be out of that house, away from that party. Bowie was better in the field, half unknowing but using his feral genius brain to figure it out.

She nodded to Bowie, hand out to him. Ever the gentleman to a girl's outstretched hand, he takes hers & they approach the boat, guessing this is their way to the Island.

At the top of the walkway up to the boat seemingly stands nobody to greet.

Then a small sound. A cackle. Of course. What else?

A tiny little pandy bear. Dressed in red & orange skirt, big bright crazy eyes. Wearing a strange sort of tall hat with odd sigils decorating it.

Iris is charmed immediately, as she would be, & kneels down to address the little Creature. Stumped for words, finger on her chin for a moment, cackles too. This delights the Captain—for what else could she be? & they cackle back & forth together awhile. Bowie waits, cursing his father for his part in this, & the Author for doing this on purpose for his own strange amusement.

Iris stands up & turns to him. Her smile is sweetly delighted & Bowie knows that she knows that he will say yes to whatever she's about to say. The imp is in her palm, lazily gnawing.

"We're going on the tour of the ship!"

Bowie nods.

Iris studies Bowie. "What's wrong?"

Bowie nods. Even tries to smile.
 Iris is not fooled.
 “Cough it up, Garrish.”

“Why do we have to go there?”
 “To see what I came from?”
 “Does that seem necessary? Do you care?”
 Iris is quiet. “I don’t know if I care but I’d like to know. Maybe it will influence our path. What we do.”
 Bowie nods.
 “What’s wrong?”
 “My father doesn’t control us. Even the Author & his book. We do what we do. You & I aren’t a trick of someone else’s mind or plan.”
 Iris nods. Even the Imp is listening.

Bowie seems better, a bit. Looks at the Imp & nods. Time to tour.

Gretta & Jamie. Jamie is alone & it’s getting darker in the courtyard. He considers leaving. Yah, right.

Little books in his long borrowed overcoat. *Hmmm.* Well? Why not?

Red one is the one he pulls out, & studies with a shudder. The light overhead is only somewhat helpful of reading these pencil scratchings.

The words are confusing, some smudged, but he starts to get it, starts to find himself paying attention, caring, getting a clarity in this strange story he’s discovering. It seems *important*.

Marie is a redhaired schoolteacher who we meet as she is having a dream of standing barefoot in a clearing in the Woods, where the twittering lights of many faeries dance around her.

She wakes, she thinks, & finds herself at the edge of the pond near the cabin where she lives with her brother Joe & their guardian Daniel.

But what’s odd is that the mountain that rises in the distance above her pond *isn’t there*, though it is still reflected in the pond’s surface itself.

Perhaps she falls back to sleep, if she had been awake, & she finds herself back in the faerie clearing but now upset about her missing mountain.

Three of the larger faeries emerge from the cloud around her.

“Please. I don’t know where my mountain is? Is it only missing in a dream?” she asks.

The faeries float near to her & *hmmm* gently to soothe her fears. “Your travels begin to solve this mystery. But you need a companion & a melody. First, close your eyes & listen. Then open them, & look!”

So Marie closes her eyes & hears, rising in her mind, like the sea coming into shore, music, sweet music, a *humming* of many voices, each one distinct, but also a blending, but also like not there at all, listens till the water recedes back from the shores of her mind, & maybe settles down deeper than easy knowing.

Opens her eyes & there before her in the clearing, sitting, looking at her with the brightest, most intelligent eyes, is a White Bunny with long furry ears. Marie thinks, or hears, the word “MeZmer,” & thus knows the Bunny’s name.

Jamie, shocked & delighted, & looks up to breathe.

Oh. Shit. There she is, dressed for the affectionate mauling, her guitar in hand, her smile dirty & 'witching as ever. *Gretta-bird.*

Cordelia. Charlie Pigeonfoot. He lets her in & then retreats to the far corner of the room. Cowering. Eager.

For fun, she's tied her brown hair into two long braids. Her halter top & short skirt already or she would have found some.

"Hi, Charlie," she says again.

He nods.

"Do you really want to do this?"

He nods.

She flows slowly onto his bed, one he hadn't much known himself yet. She stretches like a cat, yawns, smacks her lips.

He says nothing.

"Charlie."

"Cordel'a."

She starts. Not a version of her name she's heard in a long, long time.

"How did you know that?"

"I was there."

"Where?"

"*There.*"

He nods.

She sits up. "It was a long time ago, Charlie."

He nods again.

She says nothing, just rolls around the bed a little more, short skirt riding up to her lace pink panties.

He nods, goes into the bathroom, finds a pin in the medicine cabinet, lays it on the sink to wait.

"OK, go ahead," he says, reluctant, ready, pants & shorts pushed down.

Her moan begins, like barely tussled air, moves higher, lower, nearly gone, then begins to rise, & rise, & rise, call it a moan, or more call it a *humming* with wet tongue, bared teeth, here it comes, *here it comes*

And he has soaped his old cock thoroughly, closed his eyes, gets hard quicker than he thought, but yet here it comes, & fast—

"*More,*" he growls out to her—

Her fingers have pulled the panties off & her fingers slide deeply in & in & in—

He cums, slowly, leakily—it's some, not enough.

He turns off the bathroom light & sits on the floor.

Long silence. "How are you, Charlie?"

"Why?"

"I'm here. I care."

"Yah."

"Do you want to come lie down with me till you're ready?"

"No."

"Why am I here, Charlie?"



"I need to pay my hotel bill."

"*Why am I here, Charlie?*"

"I need you."

Silence.

"For what?"

"I don't know. I'm sorry. You can go."

"No. I won't."

More silence. Then she begins again. It takes him a long time to cum again, her moans become howling *hmmms*, there may be pounds at the wall, but this time it works, this time he's fucking her pretty little ass till they're both gone. This time he cums enough.

Now the pin heated under hot water. Now the mix to begin his new canvas.

Gate-Keeper. Feeling better about his prospects to take over *Clarendon Island* properly, Gate-Keeper decides he needs some sleep, the kind he's not had in a long time; not the drowsing-while-working-ceaselessly-on kind. A couple of times he found himself passed out on the floor of the Extreem Roadbuss 2000. His head hurt; he didn't feel rested.

So he pulls down the shades & shutters of the Roadbuss, many of them rusty with unuse. Pretty dark now. Finds a not-too-musty old blanket in a drawer under one of the TV monitors. Warm, comforting. Likes it more & more as he strips to his t-shirt & shorts & tucks under it.

Even in the dark he can see that the blanket is a deep soft brown, & there are many sober watching bear faces woven into its wool. *Watching him*. For a moment, he is spooked.

But . . . takes a breath . . . relaxes a little. They do too. *They are guarding him*. My. OK.

He drifts, hoping for the least memorable of dreams, nothing Benny Big Dreams would even notice. Just rest.

I am living in a small, dirty, buggy apartment. Airless. Then my mother, long dead before they buried her, waves her hand around the place & layers of clutter & filth lift & are gone, *just gone*—much better

I remain sitting awkwardly in the corner, & tinker, nail, attach, bang, & produce a filter that will eliminate all but what I want from the outside—I need to meticulously search through the rest—

I must sleep even deeper because this dream begins to fall apart, or else I filter my own self out in my search for those precious bits—

because I am dying, been told I am, my blood is sick, & have come to a sort of monastery museum—for comfort? for cure? The hallways are crimson lit & none of the doors have handles on them, & I come to a cafeteria where they all wait for me naked under their wool cloaks & hoods, heads shaven to a strange symbol meaning eternal purity & perpetual hunger

They let me into their circle & on a very small table sits a black-handled golden bell.

They say as though one: "ring this bell 10,000 times each day between dawn & dusk & you will cease sickening to death."

I wake, crying out, & when I stop I hear from everywhere outside a vast, low, deep *humming*—

It's time to get to work.

Cosmic Early. Here's the thing: he wasn't convinced he hadn't written Cordelia into existence.

She came to him in dreams long ago. Casually, at first, the kind of ridiculously pretty girl a man like him could only look at furtively as she passed, & have a good hard jack over in the nearest public restroom, or that night in bed if he could hold it.

Just her face at first, those ocean blue eyes. That curling, affectionate, mocking smile.

More of her in time. It's like he could feel her picking through his taste in girls, the sweet & dirty parts, like they were index cards, pulling out this one & that one, adjusting herself again & again, honing, honing, dressing her body & personality for him, keeping him near by moaning softly in his dream ear, letting his dream nose sniff of her, a little soap, a little turned on—

He sits up suddenly in bed; his room's shade full up as he *never* leaves it, needing full darkness to sleep.

"Hello," she says shyly. Sitting at the folding chair & taped up table he calls his desk. Somehow in silhouette still, her voice is modulated of purr & girlish music. She sniffs very cherry.

She doesn't join him in bed in this first dream, or many others subsequently. She just makes him talk, & she listens, & she asks questions, & she answers none. When she is finished, she always tells him to close his eyes, & she *hmmms* him to wake.

He wakes up sweaty & cum-stained yet he hadn't touched.

Then, she comes to say goodbye, & he isn't yet asleep. It isn't a dream. If any of it was.

Self & Ralph. While not in love, sucking each other off brought them together in a way they hadn't been since Cordelia had initially chosen one of them. She leaves them one night "to go visit an old friend," & they go up into the projectionist's room to have a smoke & a talk.

"It wasn't bad."

"What?"

"You know."

"Oh yah. I agree."

"I mean I'm not gay now. But I'm glad I did it. I'm glad it was you."

"Yah. I agree."

"Where do you think she is?"

"I don't know. I haven't known anything clearly since she came, to be honest."

"Except that white dress."

"Those tits."

"That smile."

"Those hands."

Silence.

"Are we supposed to be jealous?"

"I don't know. I'm not."

"I'm not either."

"I still want to fuck her."

"Yah."

"Maybe do her the same time?"

"Who gets which?"

They laugh. Dig out of the old filing cabinet one of their many vials of clear liquid LSD.

"Wanna watch *Dream Waves*?"

"Oh, *hell yah*."

More Fun comes on as Cordelia is visiting Charlie Pigeonfoot, & Self & Ralph are in the office, tripping balls & trying to figure out where *Dream Waves* went on the *TripTown* website.

Their boat is leaving in the morning. One more night in a tent on land. The other one is nervous & fidgety, tries to keep them talking by the fire because he sees things in the dark.

Eventually she's asleep in his arms & he tells the strange boy good night.

"Clever."

"Thank you."

"It's tonight."

"What is?"

"The letter. Light one candle. We'll read it together."

Her breathing stopped, she finds a red candle, thick, solid light. Curls into his grasp & the letter appears in his hand.

"The beginning?"

"No. The rest." She points.

He reads from there. "Your father wanted you to know that he loved you very much, but he did not help bear you.

"You came from a faraway world called Emandia. Your world died a long time ago, & a small number of your kind survived. Many somehow came to the possession of Travelers as you did. Your father learned this, & told only me of all our tribe. What he didn't tell me until he came home to die with me was how he come to have you.

"It was in the White Woods that lay beyond the garden behind the Pensionne. He was so sick, & I didn't understand all he said, but it seemed like he was saying the word Creatures. Bunny. Bear. Other names. Whoever these are had summoned him & delivered you to him.

"It was as though they were waiting for him to be ready. The Village knew he was setting off on a journey, & so when he went to the White Woods by vision to receive you, it was his last night before departure. He didn't return with you for several years, & swore me to secrecy your real age. The Village only knew him as a widower from travels, & a father of a daughter.

"I can guess now that the increased number of travels he did in later years was to find out more about your origins. But all he ever learned was that you came from Emandia, a far away dead world.

"Perhaps you will find others of your kind in years to come. I will look for answers too, & tell you if I find any. Safe travels, niece.

Love always,

Aunt."

They sleep wrapped together till dawn, not a word said aloud between them after he says "Aunt." Come morning, boat awaits.

*[Is anyone watching this
film? Does it seem to you
important enough for a bit
of an audience?]*

John. Figures if he's gonna be CareTaker awhile, he should fix up the cabin some. Task one is he disassembles & crates up the Mac G5. Carefully, kindly, but still.

Lowers the loft bed to the floor with some nails, a hammer, a few bangs & bruises. Sleeping up high seems wrong here. He's elevated over *nothing* here.

Finds a sort of attic crawl space he hadn't seen before, &, glory, a box of old books to look through. Some poetry, some philosophy, a couple of novels. These will be fine. He'll read to all of his unseen friends at night & hope they understand his friendly gesture, if not the words.

They don't manifest to him, tho he wishes.

At night he simply listens. Curtain never drawn. Tries to listen deeper & deeper, high & low. He knows that his being a man makes them reluctant. Yet he's returned, & he's trying, & he senses he's close.

Sometimes tells funny stories of him & his brother. The girl they both chased that summer, with the braids, the ocean blue eyes. The halter tops & short skirts. She knew more about coupling than either of them, turns out, & moved away before either could catch up.

"We stole some beers from a neighbor who drank all day all summer anyway, & drank a toast to virgins like us, only girls!" I laugh & laugh & try not to hurt too much in it.

I feel them close. My raw pain & love they understand. Though not visible, I hear them very quietly *humming* to salve me my sadnesses & memories. It helps.

What can I salve them of? *How can I care for them?*

Starlight Lounge—Dancing & Drinks Nightly. Does it really become a swank joint again? Does Gay Trey really sing again for crowds of people, not empty chairs?

It seems like something is happening after that good cleaning we all gave the place. Jim Reality III stays around & he & Gay Trey & sometimes Perry Homo will do a set together. Who songs, Beatles, some of Jim's originals. Their harmonies grow sweeter with time. Seems like more chairs are filled.

Godd the little pink bear stays around too. Most nights will warm up the crowd with his comedy act. Is pretty damned funny.

Rich Americus comes around more again, & often brings his friend Guy Lemonde & Guy's big pot of super strong chili. Rich will sometimes join the jam on stage. The crowd will dance madder & happier for all this.

I'm not sure what else & yet I think yes, more. Serge & Miranda look at me expectantly, even hopefully.

I promise *more, soon—*

Finally, a return to Luna T's Cafe to wrap up this *mélange*. Let's go in now, & see how this goes.

Again, most not around, but at least I know they're having fun at the Starlight Lounge.

"But you, my friend, are here."

"Of course."

"I'm glad."

"I am too."

"We can all grow & change as time goes on."

"Like the White Birch you see out the barroom door window."

"It's perfect, Doctor."

"It is what it is. We envy that."

"We don't know what we are."

"Amidst our too many theories & beliefs."

I pause. He does too. This is fun.

"I come here from a day touring around my old college town."

He raises hand. Hobbles at a slow hurry over to the jukebox. Ancient purse, ancient coins. Click.

Piano sounds tinkle out, amidst bass guitar. A little playful percussion. Some lead guitar creeps in. *Ahhh*. [Hobbles back.]

Nods. I continue. "I walked a dozen miles today, from where I used to live, to my old school, to a pretty place I'd hide when a chased youth, & back again to a benign poor folks coffee joint."

"Was it your kind of fun?"

I nod a lot. Smile. "And all night since, I've been full on deep into this book, giving it the love & devotion I feel for it."

He smiles, sort of. Sips at his coffee cup.

"Chai tea," he replies to my unspeak question. "Charles thought I'd enjoy a new treat."

"Do you?"

"We all grow & change, Raymond."

*Inside your fuego
we keep it rolling
Inside your fuego
we keep it rolling
Inside your feugo
we keep it rolling
Inside your fuego
we keep it rolling*

*rolling (rolling) rolling (rolling)
rolling (rolling) rolling (rolling)*

"The world is my gift. Writing is my thank you."

"It's a good lesson to learn."

"At times I felt old today, like a spectre haunting places that had long passed from my old days."

"Your college?"

"And my old home. And my old favorite bar. And, I don't know, the bike lanes now demarked on all the roads."

"But then?"

"I came to my hidden Place, struggled & slipped & crashed to it, under the bridge, the stream as ever, the graffiti on the bridge on both sides of the water. The birds. The rocky hills. *It was still there.*"

"As are you, my friend."

"As we both are, Doctor."

I raise my soda to his raised chai.

"That White Birch is perfect."

"Yes. It is."

"I saw it first a year ago, a struggling day. It was my companion many hours as I suffered my worst. Stood as good alternative. I've seen white birches everywhere since."

"That's good, son." I hear tiredness in his voice now. Step over to his stool to help him make his shaky way to Rebecca's office & its often-slept couch. There's a warm red blanket, & an electric blue. I use them both, after ungarmenting him some.

He looks fondly, sleepily on me.

"Does it make good fixtion when we are friends?"

"I'll figure that out. Don't worry it."

He nods, falls quickly asleep.

I leave the office & do not return to the bar, but instead walk further into T's till I come to the Ampitheatre.

Sit on the hill, looking up at the full moon, & down there to the big bonfire, & its many dancers & drummers.

Try to forget me.

Try to erase me.

I don't care. Because I believe it's not possible anyway. If I've touched you, if you me, the impression ever stays. Raised dust does not settle. It dances on. This world ever moves, ever floats, ever flies through its galaxial home, carrying us safe as we allow, always home & bound for home both.

12/15/2015
ap

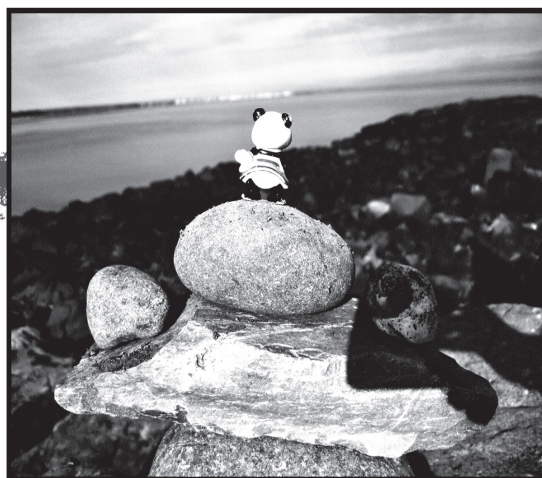
To be continued in Cenacle | 96 | April 2016

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Notes on Contributors

Algernon Beagle lives in Bags End. He is the Editor guy for *Bags End News*. Stories from his newspaper now feature regularly in these pages.

Ambrose Bierce was born in Meigs County, Ohio in 1842, & was last seen in Chihuahua, Mexico in 1914. His story in this issue is one of his most famous, & will be included in an anthology of writings about dreams in the Burning Man Books 2016 series.

Charlie Beyer lives in New Castle, Colorado. He is spending this winter in Belize. Writing his crazy, delightful words aplenty, mehopos. His writings can be found at <http://therubyeye.blogspot.com>.

Joe Coleman lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. His delightful fiction in this issue joins poetry & artwork he has published here in the past. His 2015 poetry RaiBook, *Kingdom of Clowns*, can be found at: <http://www.scriptorpress.com/raibooks/kingdomofclowns.html>.

Judih Haggai lives at Kibbutz Nir Oz in Israel. Her haiku appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. We recently decided we are neither religious, nor spiritual, nor secular. Her writings can be found online at: <http://tribes.tribe.net/poetryjams>.

Jimmy Heffernan lives in Salt Lake City, Utah. He is a new contributor to *The Cenacle*, having contacted me online about being involved. His voice is still in its formative stages, but the poems in this issue represent its clearest development yet. More good ones to come, no doubt.

Nathan D. Horowitz lives in Vienna, Austria. Chapters from great his book-in-progress, *Nighttime Daydreams*, regularly appear in these pages. More of his work can be found online at: <http://www.scribd.com/Nathan%20Horowitz> and <http://lordarbor.bandcamp.com>.

Colin James lives in western Massachusetts. His poetry first featured in *Cenacle* | 92 | April 2015. His cryptical poetry has quite struck a chord amongst the various other contributors to this journal.

Dr. Timothy Leary was born in Springfield, Massachusetts in 1920, & died in Los Angeles, California in 1996. His deeply insightful & enthusiastic writings about LSD & other psychedelics have helped to inform millions about the best practices regarding these medicines.

Martina Newberry lives in Palm Springs, California. Her poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Her poem in the current issue sinks a deep line into things.

Tom Sheehan lives in Saugus, Massachusetts. His writings appear regularly in *The Cenacle*. His beautiful poems are like artfully carved blocks of heavy old wood.

Kassandra Soulard lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. She has, through her photographic, graphic arts, & layout talents, helped to create the fine publication before you.

Raymond Soulard, Jr. lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. Glad to have come to the conclusion of another year writing & editing in my usual furious manner.

* * * * *





Bring on the archaic revival, & let's create a new world!
-- Terence McKenna

